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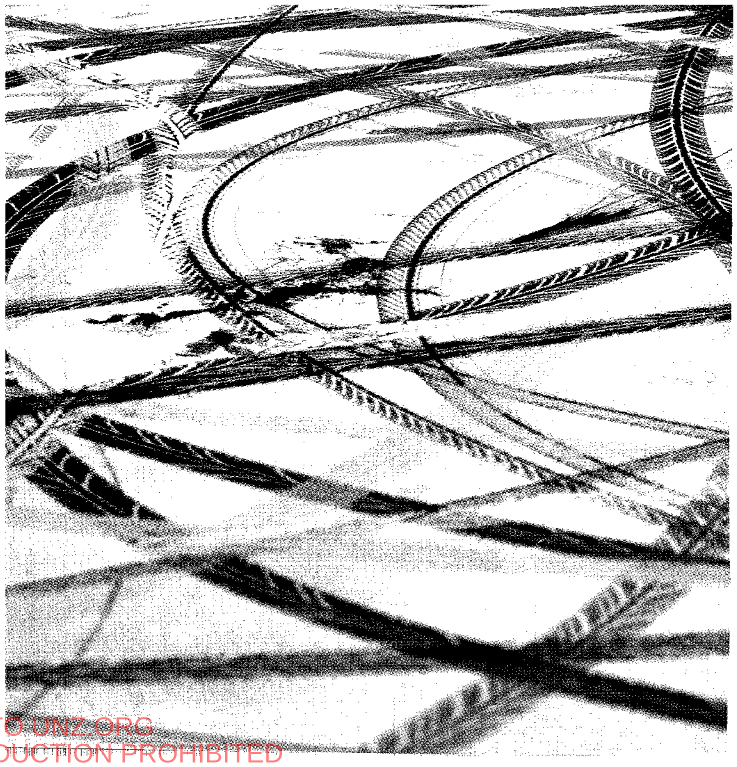
THE NEW YORKER

MAY 18, 2009



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Suspended 30 feet in the air, sandwiched between camera equipment, a film director and an Academy Award™–nominated actor stands artist Robin Rhode. The circumstances that brought him to this moment reside directly below — a 100 x 200–foot white canvas. Located stage left sits an all-new 2009 BMW Z4 Roadster rigged with gallons of paint. What will unfold over the next seven hours is a secret Robin's not ready to divulge. Perhaps it's because he doesn't know. In truth it's because he doesn't have the slightest inclination. The lights dim. The Z4 engine roars. Action.

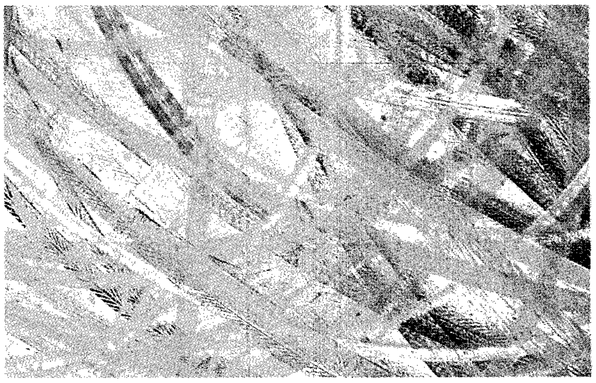
But first let's start at the beginning. The very beginning. In 1975 Alexander Calder put paint to car and transformed a BMW 3.0 into a piece of art. In the nearly 35 years that followed, influential artists from Warhol to Lichtenstein to Holzer would embellish BMWs with their own personal creative visions. Built on the idea that only an independent company could offer the freedom that artists require, these Art Cars became symbols of BMW's commitment to the arts and laid the foundation for this latest creative endeavor.

Every artist has his muse, and in this case, it's a stunning 300-horsepower BMW Z4 Roadster. With a 0–60 time of 5.1 seconds* and a new 7-speed Double Clutch Transmission to enhance driving pleasure, every detail of this Roadster has been meticulously crafted and reengineered. From the pampered interior that dons stitched leather and wood trim to the elegant and sporty lines of the exterior to the new retractable hardtop, this joyful Z4 experience redefines the art of driving.

To introduce their Roadster to the world, BMW commissioned South African artist Robin Rhode to literally capture the joy and spontaneous emotion of the Z4 drive. But rather than a BMW serving as the canvas like it did in the past, it will now become the paintbrush. But what does joy look like? How do you convey something so personal, so abstract? You start with color. Robin chose five — yellow, red, blue, green and gray — each color rooted in BMW Art Car heritage. To Robin this painting should live as an homage to all the great artists before him. His joy was inspired by their joy.

On November 2, 2008, the large bay doors of Downey Studios opened, and a parade of forklifts brought in the massive canvas. Across Los Angeles, intricate paint dispensers were engineered to the Z4 to precisely capture the Roadster's fingerprint on the canvas. A remote control would allow Robin to regulate how much paint would be applied and to which specific tire. To document this art creation, BMW partnered with director Jake Scott of RSA Films. His vision was to design an elaborate camera grid consisting of over 40 HD cameras above and around the canvas to ensure that every inch was covered. But as the day of the event arrived, one question remained unanswered: What would this painting look like? If Robin knew, he wasn't telling. His abstract painting would be created spontaneously, driven by the emotion of the moment. A rough sketch would be his guide, but the rest remained under lock and key in his head.

And so the beginning brings us to the end: Robin hovering 30 feet over a blank canvas. Below, foreign press, art journalists and actor/art enthusiast Dennis Hopper wait anxiously for what will unfold. Maybe they'll witness an epic disaster. Or maybe they'll witness the beauty that is an artist within his moment. Whatever they are about to see is a secret Robin isn't ready to divulge. Perhaps it's because he doesn't know. In truth it's because he doesn't have the slightest inclination.



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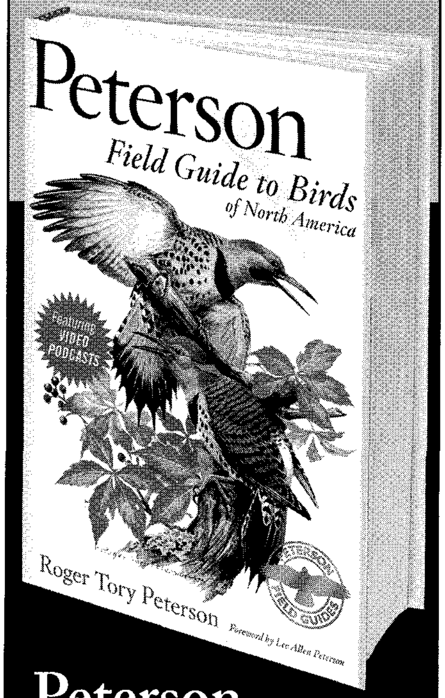

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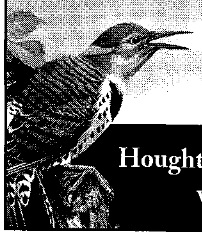

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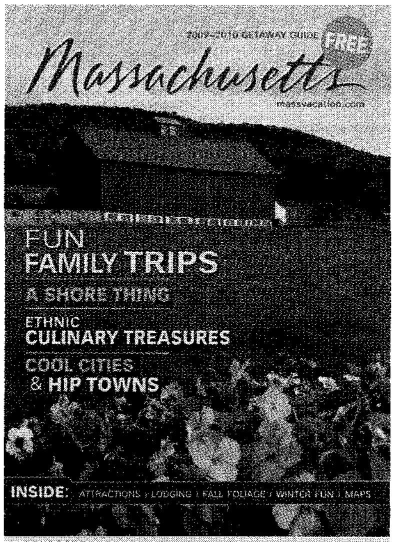

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CONTRIBUTORS

Nick Paumgarten ("The Death of Kings," p. 40) is a staff writer.

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Jonah Lehrer ("Don't!," p. 26) published his second book, "How We Decide," in February.

Julia Ioffe (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) writes for *The New Republic* and *Fortune*.

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Roz Chast (Drawing, p. 47) created the illustrations for the children's book "Dot in Larryland," by Patricia Marx. She is the author of "Theories of Everything: Selected, Collected, Health-Inspected Cartoons, 1978-2006."

Dean Young (Poem, p. 31) is the William Livingston Chair of Poetry at the University of Texas, Austin. "Primitive Mentor" is his most recent poetry collection.

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Salman Rushdie (Fiction, p. 66) is the author of ten novels, including "The Enchantress of Florence," which is now in paperback.

Philip Schultz (Poem, p. 62) was awarded the 2008 Pulitzer Prize in poetry for his collection "Failure."

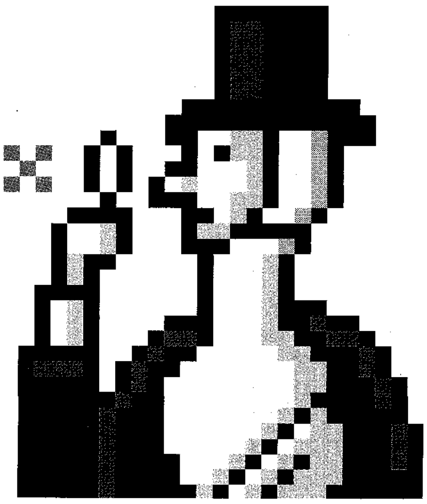
Arthur Krystal (Books, p. 72) is currently working on a book about F. Scott Fitzgerald. His books of essays include "Agitations" and "The Half-Life of an American Essayist."

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 82), the magazine's senior drama critic, is the author of "Honky Tonk Parade." He is working on a book about Tennessee Williams.

Eric Drooker (Cover) is a painter and a graphic novelist. "Slingshot," a collection of his political graphics, came out last year, and a special edition of "Blood Song: A Silent Ballad" is due out in the fall.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *Nick Paumgarten* on the financial meltdown; *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts our weekly political roundtable; *Tobias Wolff* reads a Denis Johnson story. / Slide shows: The Francesco Clemente drawings that inspired *Salman Rushdie;* fashion photographs by *Richard Avedon.* / *Jonah Lehrer* answers readers' questions. / Blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* on politics, *James Surowiecki* on the economy, *Steve Coll* on the stimulus, *Macy Halford* on books, *Richard Brody* on movies, and more. / The Book Club reads Geoff Dyer's new novel. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.



THE MAIL

DRIVEN

Peter J. Boyer, in his otherwise spot-on piece about the car industry, assumes that I once leased G.M.'s sadly fated EV1 electric car and, like other drivers of that twin-seat rocket of a vehicle, watched the emission-free car be wrested from my garage, towed away, and busted up into pieces of metal, glass, and rubber smaller than razor blades ("The Road Ahead," April 27th). Luckily, I did not. The source of Boyer's slight inaccuracy may have been the documentary film "Who Killed the Electric Car?," which used a clip of a visit I made to the "Late Show with David Letterman," during which I claimed to be saving America one electric car at a time. However, by the time I began shopping for an all-electric car, in 2003, the EV1 had already been yanked from showrooms as if the car had never existed. Instead, I found what was purported to be the very last electric car available for sale in the state of California—a Toyota EV. It had four doors, a rear hatch, room for my family, including a dog in the back, power windows, A/C, a great sound system, and the fastest, most effective windshield defroster known to mankind. When the car companies collectively, and, to some, diabolically, decided to take these cars back, the electric vehicles disappeared. But not mine. I have the pink slip. I own that car, and it is still driven every day, albeit by one of my crack staff of employees. My electric car recently crossed fifty thousand miles on the odometer with its original battery but without so much as a splash of gasoline.

Tom Hanks
Los Angeles, Calif.

Boyer cites G.M.'s health-insurance obligations as an example of its "deep underlying structural problems." As he explains, the company, now facing the prospect of bankruptcy, insures approximately ten people for each current employee, covering a total of one million people. But this statistic reveals a broader and more striking structural problem. It is not economically viable for a company to insure its current and former workers and their families, yet many of the same people calling for G.M. to enter bankruptcy in order to wipe out its employee obligations also resist calls for government reform of health care. Without significant government intervention in health-care policy, our best-case scenario is to become a nation of sound and competitive businesses staffed by debt-ridden and unhealthy workers.

John Teschner
Milledgeville, Ga.

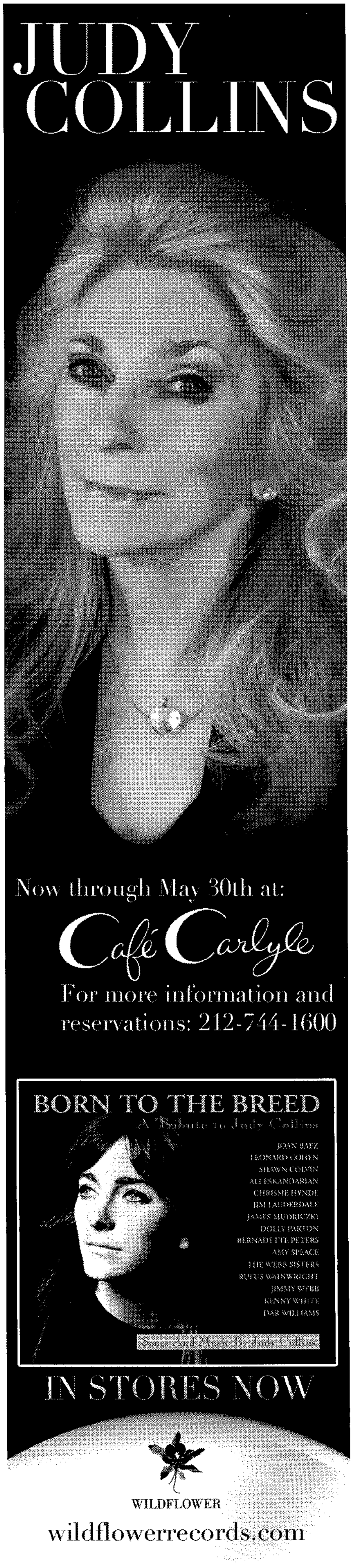
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Jon Lee Anderson offers a well-researched and informative look at the current situation in Iran, but his article falls prey to the same problem of nearly all reporting on Iran that originates in the United States ("Can Iran Change?," April 13th). Anderson presents the U.S. and Israel as honest, well-intentioned, and rational players on the international stage who are trying to rein in an unpredictable and potentially dangerous state. But a frank discussion about relations between the U.S., Israel, and Iran ought to include the crucial U.S. support for the overthrow of Iran's democratically elected government in 1953; U.S. funding of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war of the nineteen-eighties; and Israel's ongoing policy of ignoring international law. I'm no defender of the repugnant policies of the current government of Iran. I'm just as offended by its impingement of freedoms and violations of human rights as the next person. However, an intelligent policy debate within the U.S. depends upon our being more forthcoming about the details of the relations between these nations. In the process, it might even help us confront one of the glaring blind spots of foreign-policy debates: American exceptionalism.

Ken Ehrlich
Los Angeles, Calif.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



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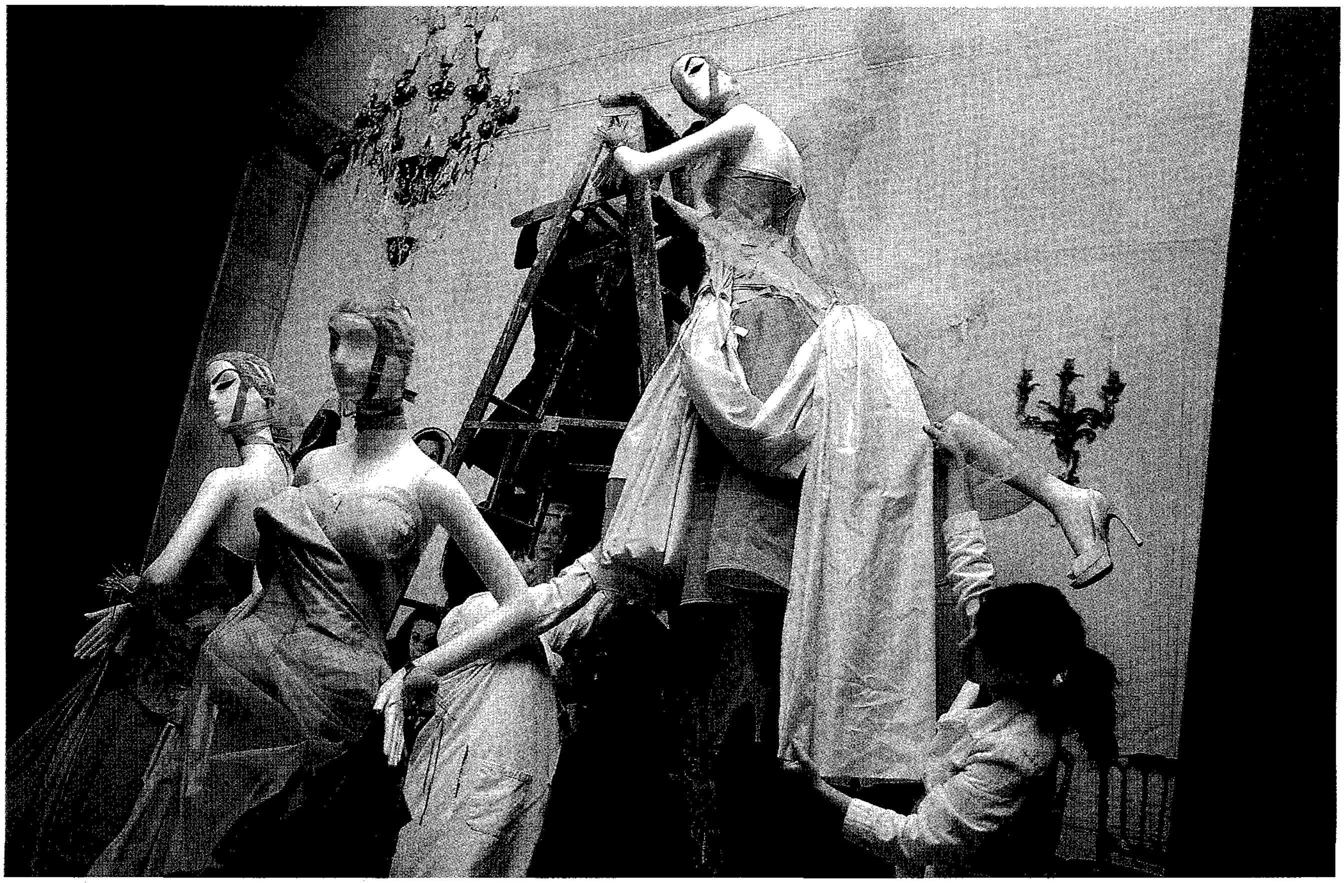

"The Model as Muse," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
TRUE TO LIFE

The playwright and novelist Theresa Rebeck's latest comedy, "Our House," a sendup of reality television set in the Midwest, has its New York première at Playwrights Horizons. Michael Mayer ("Spring Awakening") directs. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
ROOM TO BREATHE

The crafty local neo-soul singer Imani Coppola takes a break from her retro-funk group, Little Jackie, for a series of intimate acoustic shows at the Living Room. She kicks off a three-week Sunday-night residency there this week. (See page 9.)

ART
FRANK ASSESSMENT

The Guggenheim's iconic building turned fifty this year. To mark the occasion, the museum has installed "Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward," a survey of sixty-four projects by the trailblazing American architect, seen in original drawings as well as in newly commissioned models and digital animations. (See page 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LONG, STRANGE TRIP

The Guarneri String Quartet, a bulwark of American chamber music for four decades, says farewell this year. The group's original cellist, David Soyer, participates in its final concert at the Metropolitan Museum, a program of works by Beethoven and Schubert (the String Quintet in C Major). (See page 15.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
BROADWAY ALL DAY

Symphony Space brings the Great White Way uptown with its latest free marathon event. "Wall to Wall Broadway" features twelve hours of musical theatre and discussion, starting with performers from "The Lion King," "Mary Poppins," "The Little Mermaid," and other shows. The legendary producer Harold Prince, who has twenty-one Tony Awards to his name, will then talk about his career, and the conductor Paul Gemignani will lead a concert in the evening. The singers include Brian Stokes Mitchell, Rebecca Luker, and Donna Murphy. (See page 18.)

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ACTING UP

Annie Clark, who does business as St. Vincent, wrote much of her new album, "Actor," by drawing, not playing. Mainly a guitarist, Clark began the album in a French hotel room in December of 2007, using GarageBand software and a pair of headphones, "drawing notes one by one, until they sounded how they should sound." When she had finished eleven songs, a friend printed them out in traditional notation, which she and her band used to learn the material. Clark and her music land in the spot right between the laptop and staff paper: progressive rock. In Clark's hands, though, this genre becomes lighter, more elastic, and less sure of itself, all to the good. "Actor" is elaborate and wide awake. There are brief echoes of Robert Fripp's guitar mandalas and XTC's sense of ornate and generous melody. Clark is not big on fretboard hammering and light-speed runs, but she can get deliciously, specifically aggressive with a whammy bar. That move alone makes it worth a trip to Webster Hall when St. Vincent plays a full-band set on May 20.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AMERICAN HWANGAP
Lloyd Suh's new comedy, presented by the Play Company and Ma-Yi Theatre, centers on a Korean family in West Texas celebrating its patriarch's sixtieth birthday. Trip Cullman directs. In previews. Opens May 17. (The Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.)

AMERICAS OFF BROADWAY
This festival culls plays produced by American regional companies, beginning with Morris Panych's "The Dishwashers," directed by Byam Stevens, from the Chester Theatre Company, in Massachusetts, which opens May 13. "A Play on Words," by Brian Dykstra, from Ithaca's Kitchen Theatre Company, in previews, opens May 17. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

BERLIN/WALL
At the Public, David Hare performs two of his monologues: "Berlin," about the city twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and "Wall," about the Israel/Palestine security fence. Stephen Daldry directs. May 14-17. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

BLOODY BLOODY ANDREW JACKSON: THE CONCERT VERSION
As part of the Public LAB series, Alex Timbers, in association with Les Freres Corbusier, wrote and directs this musical, a satirical look at the seventh President. Michael Friedman wrote the music and lyrics. In previews. Opens May 17. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

CORALINE
Stephin Merritt, of the Magnetic Fields, wrote the music and lyrics for this musical, and David Greenspan wrote the book, based on the novel by Neil Gaiman, about a bored, lonely girl who steps into a fantasy world. Jayne Houdyshell stars in the title role. Leigh Silverman directs the MCC Theatre production. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

GROUNDSWELL
The New Group presents a thriller by Ian Bruce, in which two South African lodge employees hatch a get-rich-quick scheme involving nearby diamond mines. Larry Bryggman, David Lansbury, and Souleymane Sy Savane star; Scott Elliott directs. In previews. Opens May 18. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OUR HOUSE
Michael Mayer directs the New York première of a new dark comedy by Theresa Rebeck, about a news anchor who becomes the star of a reality TV show. Previews begin May 15. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE RIVALRY
Norman Corwin wrote this play, about the 1858 debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. Vincent Dowling directs. Previews begin May 15. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE I DIE
Zakiyyah Alexander's new play, about two estranged sisters attempting to reconcile, kicks off Second Stage's uptown summer series. Jackson Gay directs. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

VIEUX CARRÉ
Austin Pendleton directs the Tennessee Williams play, set in a New Orleans boarding house. In previews. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

NOW PLAYING

ACCENT ON YOUTH
Samson Raphaelson's 1934 comedy is an urbane, well-written meditation from a literate time gone by, about a successful writer who is losing the battle between his work and his women. The work goes swimmingly; the relationships with women don't. As the morose writer, David Hyde Pierce does his droll thing, ably supported by Charles Kimbrough as his plucky butler. The casting of the women is more problematic; they make the struggle between life and art a rather easier choice than it should be. Daniel Sullivan directed this pleasant revival, which could have used more heat under it. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

CHRISTMAS IS MILES AWAY
At the Connelly, Babel Theatre Project presents this drama by Chloe Moss, which follows three English friends as they grow apart. Geordie Broadwater directs. (220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS
At the beginning of Eugene O'Neill's 1924 play, set on a New England farm circa 1850, Eben Cabot (Pablo Schreiber) pines for his dead mother. His grief is exacerbated by the man he holds responsible for his mother's death: his father, Ephraim (Brian Dennehy). The director, Robert Falls, has cut the play from three acts to one, and made the script more openly erotic and less biased against the character of Abbie (Carla Gugino), the new bride whom Ephraim brings home, and whom Eben takes to and against from the first. It's a measure of Falls's inventiveness as a director that Abbie and Eben's desire for each other is rarely spoken. And when the inevitable happens—Eben and Abbie consummate their passion, thus entering the "hopeless hope" that O'Neill claimed as the credo of many of his characters—we can barely stand the suspense. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/11/09.) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

EVERYDAY RAPTURE
Dick Scanlan and Sherie Rene Scott, who also stars, wrote this coming-of-age story, about a Mennonite girl who goes to Manhattan. Michael Mayer directs. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

GALILEO / THE SCIENCE PLAYS
Milk Can Theatre Company performs two plays in repertory: "Galileo," Bertolt Brecht's meditation on the mathematician's philosophies (directed by Julie Fei-Fan Balzer), and "The Science Plays," a compendium of short works spanning topics from Archimedes to the future. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444. Through May 17.)

THE HIROSHIMA PROJECT
This monthlong event includes readings of American and Japanese plays and Steven Okazaki's documentary "White Light/Black Rain." Chiori Miyagawa's new play, "I Have Been to Hiroshima Mon Amour," depicts two love stories set in that city. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
At BAM's Harvey Theatre, Watermill Theatre and the all-male company Propeller present the Shakespeare comedy, directed by Edward Hall. (651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through May 17.)

OFFICES
Glib, terse, and inconsequential, these anecdotes probably wouldn't have found their way before paying customers were not the playwright, Ethan Coen, one of the filmmaking Coen brothers. More story, more thought, and a little less self-satisfaction would have been welcome. F. Murray Abraham as a panhandler who briefly becomes a suit is almost worth the price of admission. Crisply directed by Neil Pepe on a revolving stage that has a life of its own. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

SOPHISTRY
It's hard to imagine a less timely revival than Jonathan Marc Sherman's 1993 play, about hedonistic undergrads at a New England college and sexual-harassment allegations made against a beloved philosophy professor by an unstable student. It's clear what must have seemed fresh then—hard-drinking undergrads hooking up, making your-mother jokes, smoking from bongs, coming to the defense of a beloved gay professor—material buoyed by its cultural immediacy and fu-

AKIKO KATO

elled by the energy of young stars like Ethan Hawke. But despite solid performances by the veteran actor Jonathan Hogan, as the professor, and Ian Alda, as a neurotic student, this production, directed by James Warwick, doesn't have the zip to punch up what comedy there is or to obscure the flaws in the script. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

WAITING FOR GODOT
Roundabout Theatre Company presents Samuel Beckett's masterpiece. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **EXIT THE KING:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GUYS AND DOLLS:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **IRENA'S VOW:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY STUART:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE NORMAN CONQUESTS:** Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **THE PHILANTHROPIST:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **REASONS TO BE PRETTY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **33 VARIATIONS:** O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 19: Proud underdogs of the so-called New Wave of British Heavy Metal (or "NWOBHM," as denim-clad denizens awkwardly truncated it in the early eighties), **Saxon** bore all the trappings of the subgenre (aggressive outlaw anthems fuelled by duelling guitar solos and theatrical vocals), but failed to reach the same platinum heights as their peers in Iron Maiden and Def Leppard. In fact, several abortive attempts to crack America earned them the dubious honor of being a real-life Spinal Tap.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 14: While they didn't deliver the prurient outrage of the Sex Pistols or the fiery agitprop of the Clash, the cartoony British punk stalwarts the **Damned** earned their place in the history books by being the first of their class to get a bit of vinyl into the record shops (their adrenalized début LP, "Damned Damned Damned"). Three decades and an unfathomable number of lineup changes later, the Damned are still at it. The original powerhouse drummer, Rat Scabies, left the fold several years back (he went on to write a book about the search for the Holy Grail), but the mainstays Captain Sensible, on guitar, and Dave Vanian, on vocals, endearingly refuse to bow out. May 15: **Buckcherry** reared their dazed, tattooed heads in the mid-nineties, flying the flag of late-eighties party rock. Their hedonistic, ersatz metal became popular with kids too young to have experienced it the first time around, but, four albums later, the party has started to wear thin. Now their Guns N' Roses/Aerosmith sonic pastiche sounds more cautionary than celebratory. May 19: Joey Ramone's birthday bash. Eight strange years after the lanky punk architect's death, the crowds still come out for his birthday party. This year, the performers include **Fishbone**, the **Supersuckers**, and many others.

STORY OF AN I
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Lit Crawl NYC takes over the Lower East Side for a night (see Above and Beyond).

DAVID SANDLIN

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—May 17: **Ayo**, a German-born singer of Nigerian descent (her name is Yoruba for "joy"), traffics in smooth soul-pop with an appealing, abraded world-beat core.

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7237)—May 17: As a local college student in the late nineties, the singer **Imani Coppola** cut some tracks with the Digable Planets that caught the attention of the industry and landed her a contract with Columbia Records. She parlayed that into a sassy hit, "Legend of a Cowgirl," built around a sample from Donovan's "Sunshine Superman." Then she was dropped by Columbia. Since then she's been more or less out on her own, but that hasn't dented her determination. She's toured with the elastic vocalist Mike Patton, in his Peeping Tom project, put out a record on his Ipecac Recordings label, and has a newish project called Little Jackie, with the producer Adam Pallin. She's here performing acoustic sets on Sunday nights through May 31.

MARC RIBOT BIRTHDAY RETROSPECTIVE
Most people go out of their way to mark conventional milestones like their thirtieth, fortieth, and fiftieth birthdays. **Marc Ribot** is anything but conventional. The guitarist, who has played on such prominent pop recordings as Robert Plant and Alison Krauss's "Raising Sand" and who always seems hard at work on one of his own innovative projects, is in the midst of celebrating his fifty-fifth birthday. On May 12, he's at the Stone playing solo and with his early groups Shrek and Rootless Cosmopolitans; on May 13, at Joe's Pub, he delves into venturesome jazz full of free improvisation with his Albert Ayler tribute band, Spiritual Unity, which includes the Ayler veteran Henry Grimes, on bass; on May 14 he's back at the Stone for an homage to the Haitian guitarist Frantz Casseus followed by an appearance by his latest band, Sun Ship; on May 15, he heads to (Le) Poisson Rouge with his Latin act, Los Cubanos Postizos, who will be joined by the Peruvian master percussionist Cotito; the following night, he returns to the same place to wrap things up, by adding the Budapest-born chanteuse and violinist Eszter Balint to his power trio, Ceramic Dog. (For more information, visit www.marcribot.com.)

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—May 16: The **Mother Hips**, a Bay Area quartet, hooked up nearly twenty years ago at Chico State. A couple of record deals and sabbaticals later, they continue to deliver a romping strain of countrified psychedelic power pop laced with traces of Merle Haggard, Barry Gibb, and the Eagles. Tim Bluhm and Greg Loiacano, the songwriters and front men, know how to sing it sweet and play it dirty.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—**The No Fun Fest**, three days of relentless caterwaul capable of making the untrained ear bleed, is an annual event tailored to the (very) acquired tastes of experimental-noise aficionados. For them, it is not simply seventy-two hours of grinding feedback, but rather a lineup that runs the gamut from vaguely accessible rock—notably the scene stalwarts and alternative royalty **Sonic Youth**, on May 16—to the full-on avant-garde realm, where jazz, electronica, indie, and pop converge on a volatile new sonic frontier. The other acts include **Bastard Noise** (May 15), **Bardo Pond** (May 16), and **Merzbow** (May 17).

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—May 13: **Animal Collective** is an oft-freaky experimental ensemble that gathers elements of folk, psychedelia, rock, and pop into a heady stew. That may sound off-putting, but the band has honed its methods and has found a way to make its bizarre musical concoctions not only palatable, but downright delicious. May 18 and May 21: The **Shins** vaulted

from cozy cult status to relative ubiquity after Natalie Portman mentioned them in Zach Braff's understated 2004 comedy, "Garden State." Despite the exposure, the Shins' most recent album "Wincing the Night Away," found the band's signature blend of delicate pop pleasingly intact.

UNION HALL
702 Union St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-638-4400)—May 13: More than a dozen years before Katy Perry had a hit with "I Kissed a Girl," **Jill Sobule** charted with a better song with the same title. Since then, Sobule has continued to write and record uncommonly witty, well-crafted, and affecting tunes. The pop-culture spotlight may have moved on, but Sobule's fans stand by her: they financed her latest record, "California Years." May 15: The **Mother Hips** (see the Mercury Lounge).

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—May 14: **Lez Zeppelin.** The name may call to mind the type of one-liner that would have reduced Beavis and Butthead to hysterics, but the all-girl Zeppelin tribute band has garnered critical acclaim for its polished bombast. The band's lineup changed earlier this year, and only the founder, Steph Paynes, remains from those early days of high praise. May 15: Preëminent progenitors of the lumbering guitar sound that would later be termed grunge, the **Melvins,** from Aberdeen, Washington, prefigured and influenced the Seattle scene of the early nineties. Though most renowned for their thick, weighty assault, there is a surprising amount of complexity to their music. Nonetheless, the layperson may still run screaming for the exit.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 13-16: The **Heath Brothers Quartet.** The bassist Percy Heath may be gone, but his masterly siblings, the saxophonist Jimmy and the drummer Albert (Tootie), soldier on, with the pianist Jeb Patton and the bassist David Wong in tow.

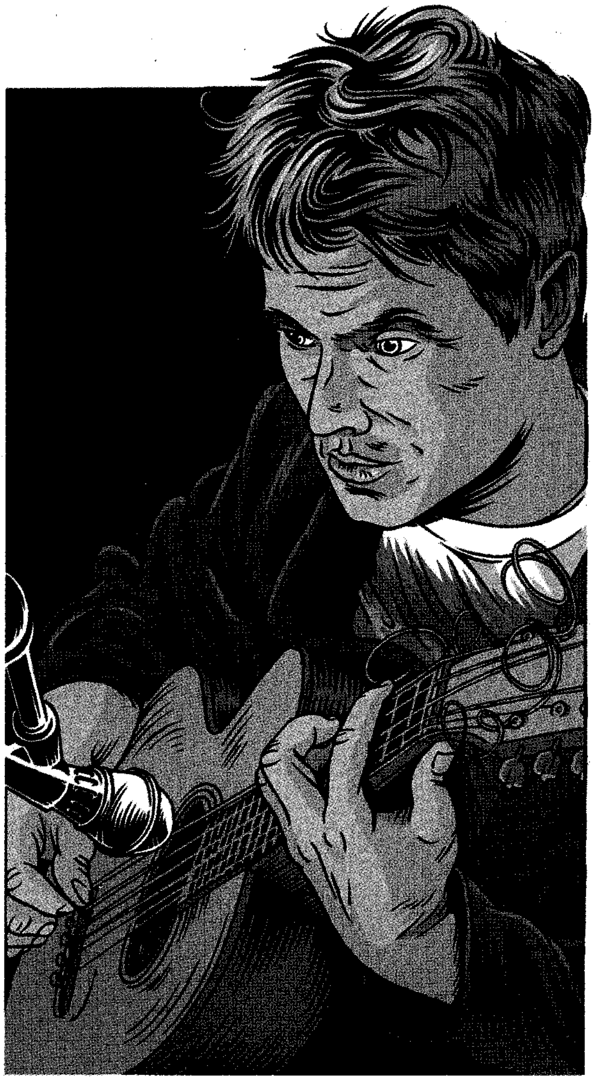
BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 12-17: The flamenco guitarist **Ottmar Liebert** and his band, Luna Negra, have released two albums in the last year, "The Scent of Light" and "Up Close," which get a lot of play on smooth-jazz stations. Don't let that scare you. Liebert is an intense player whose embrace of world-music idioms burns with passion.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 12-17: One of the last major surviving horn soloists to emerge from the big-band incubator, the saxophonist and flutist **Frank Wess,** here fronting a horn-heavy nonet, retains a silky tone and taut responses that belie his eighty-seven years. May 18: The Latin-music luminary **Ray Santos** celebrates his eightieth birthday with a host of special guests, including the trumpeter **Chocolate,** the percussionist **Candido,** and the trombonist **Jimmy Bosch.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 13-17: The **Kenny Garrett Band.** Fresh from touring with Chick Corea and John McLaughlin's Five Peace band, the saxophonist Garrett gets to spend some unencumbered time in the spotlight, a place where this ebullient stylist is quite comfortable. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—May 15-16, in the Allen Room: The pianist **McCoy Tyner** will be joined by the saxophonist **Ravi Coltrane,** who, to his credit, has successfully sidestepped comparisons with his illustrious father, John, Tyner's former employer.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The "Catalan Days" festival presents a week of contemporary Iberian jazz, with the trio **Triphasic,** on May 13; the pianist **Fernández-Guy-López** (a fan of Cecil Taylor and Iannis Xenakis) and his trio, on May 14; the percussionist **Marc Miralta,** on May 15; the pianist **Chano Domínguez** (who leans toward flamenco) and his quartet, on May 16; the bassist **Alexis Cuadrado** and his group Cuarteto Ibérico, who will be joined by Miralta, later on May 16; and, on May 17, the multitalented pianist **Jordi Rossy** (who as a drummer has worked with Chick Corea, Joshua Redman, and Charlie Haden) and his quartet. May 19: The perennially undervalued mainstream pianist **Lynne Arriale** leads her Nuance quartet, featuring the trumpeter **Randy Brecker** and the bassist **George Mraz.**



The eclectic guitarist Marc Ribot celebrates his birthday.

JÖRN KASPUHL

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 12-17: The adventurous guitarist **Bill Frisell** convenes a lean, conversational trio featuring his longtime collaborators, the bassist **Tony Scherr** and the drummer **Kenny Wollesen.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600."** Through June 21. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. ♦ **"The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984."** Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom."** Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion."** Through Aug. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Projects 89: Klara Liden."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel."** Through June 15. ♦ **"Aernout Mik."** Through July 27. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Intervals: Julieta Aranda."** Through July 19. ♦ **"Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward."** Opens May 15. ♦ **"Learning by Doing."** Opens May 15. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect."** Through May 31. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg: Early Sculpture, Drawings, and Happenings Films."** Through Aug. 30. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen: The Music Room."** Through Aug. 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family Collection."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Sun K. Kwak: Enfolding Two Hundred and Eighty Hours."** The origins of Kwak's site-specific drawing in the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Gallery are part nine-to-five job, part performance piece—the hours in the title refer to the length of time it took the artist and her assistants to install the piece, in public, during regular visiting hours, using three miles' worth of black masking tape. (Some enterprising curator should consider a show on "the Home Depot effect.") The resulting wraparound work makes for tasteful décor but bland art, evoking a rushing river, swirling smoke, and the freehand strokes of a giant brush—a twofer dilution of calligraphic painting and Lichtenstein. Through July 5. ♦ **"Gustave Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea."** Through July 5. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

CHELSEA ART MUSEUM
556 W. 22nd St. (212-255-0719)—**"Modern Modern."** Through June 13. (Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Fashioning Felt."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Shahzia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection."**

Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Design for a Living World."** Opens May 14. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Unica Zürn: Dark Spring."** Through July 23. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Avedon Fashion 1944–2000."** Opens May 15. ♦ **"David Seidner: Paris Fashions, 1945."** Opens May 15. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Manga + Video Games."** Through June 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Hail the little black book. Thanks to the meticulously typed records that Goudstikker, an Old Masters dealer, snuck out of Holland when he fled Nazi-occupied Amsterdam in 1940, more than two hundred works looted from his collection have been recovered (though more than a thousand are still at large). This exhibition focusses on both quality and context. Beautifully crafted Italian panels from the fifteenth century, works by major Dutch masters like Ruisdael and Utrecht's greatest seventeenth-century portraitist, Paulus Moreelse, are accompanied by Goudstikker's inventory notebook, installed in a vitrine and reproduced on a touch screen that allows visitors to flip through the entries. Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust."** Through Oct. 1. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker*."** Through May 24. ♦ **"New at the Morgan: Acquisitions Since 2004."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"184th Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art."** The latest iteration of this time-honored show is a lacklustre affair (the Academy's policy of exhibiting works selected by the members themselves, instead of by a jury, may not help matters). Abstraction falls flattest, with second-rate paintings by first-rate artists, including Thomas Nozkowski, Joan Snyder, and Pat Steir. Realism fares better; Philip Pearlstein's eye-teasing canvas "Model with Chrome Chair, Kiddie Car, Kimono, and Bambino" could launch a one-man movement of pattern and reflection. Other gems include Susanna Coffey's penumbral, Boschian painting "The Last Library," Faith Ringgold's grafitti-embellished subway scene with a quilted border, and Jane Freilicher's still-life "Pierrot and Peonies," a shimmering love letter to Watteau. Through June 10. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"The Generational: Younger Than Jesus."** Through June 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Harlem 1970-2009: Photographs by Camilo José Vergara."** Through July 12. ♦ **"Landmarks of New York."** Through July 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kalup Linzy: If It Don't Fit."** Through June 28. ♦ **"Collected: Propositions on the Permanent Collection."** Through June 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

YAYOI KUSAMA
All-over abstractions in Kusama's familiar repertoire of webby or stitchy, repetitive strokes are nearly as wearisome to look at as they must have been to make. Big-format painting dissipates the intensity that the artist has realized, at times, in small pictures and sewn constructions. Variations of color and texture feel forced. Nor does a slick new all-mirrored room with flickering lights, titled "Aftermath of Obliteration of Eternity," do more than iterate the Kusama shtick. She used to be impressively obsessive. Now she seems dully driven. Through June 27. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

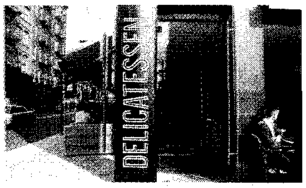
ROBERT LONGO
Longo is back with his stock in trade of vast charcoal drawings on interchangeably portentous themes, more varied than usual in subject matter but as dogged as ever in form. A misty forest, a light-flooded cathedral, and a satellite view of Tokyo at night deliver the standard sensation—the visual equivalent of random, thunderous guitar chords from a heavy-metal band warming up. There's one nifty departure: a square column, twelve feet high, that is faced with monochrome charcoals behind sheets of glass that function as darkling mirrors—putting viewers in the picture, like so many creatures immersed in a lugubrious aquarium. Through May 30. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

ZWELETHU MTHETHWA
The great South African photographer makes portraits of his fellow-Africans, at home and at work, but always steeped in their environment. His latest show of large-scale color photographs draws from three series made in Mozambique: small boys scavenging in a dump, young men trying their luck outside the law at a quartz mine, and men selling big bags of charcoal at a marketplace. Mthethwa calls the ragged children gladiators, and in a sense all of his subjects are engaged in a heroic, life-and-death struggle. Survival is not so obviously at stake for the coal sellers, who pose proudly among their stacked wares, but the precariousness of their life means every expression of satisfaction here is hard won. Through May 23. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701.)

ALBERT OEHLEN
The most resourceful abstract painter alive, Oehlen wows with big canvases that alchemize four elements: collaged sheets of Spanish billboard advertising, flatly painted schemes of miscellaneous bold motifs, considerable amounts of blank white, and spates of skittery or splotchy, rousingly lyrical brushwork whose sensual intelligence recalls Cy Twombly at his finest. It's uncanny how the little gestures—in peachy or lavenderish hues, with the odd spark of cadmium or of thalo green—trump the huge and powerful graphic designs that underlie and surround them. It's as if a NASA rocket blasted off to release, into orbit, a nosegay. Through May 30. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

NOGUCHI RIKA
This Japanese-born, Berlin-based photographer shows a series of modestly scaled color images of landscapes nearly blotted out by the sun that were included in the 2008 Carnegie International. Shooting into the sun is usually an amateur photographer's mistake, resulting in a brilliant, starlike flare and uncontrolled overexposure, both of which are further exaggerated in these pictures by the artist's use of a homemade pinhole camera. Barbara Ess has been here before, but the low-tech expressionist effect remains seductive—dreamy and quasi-visionary,

TABLES FOR TWO
DELICATESSEN



JESSIE WENDER

54 Prince St. (212-226-0211)—As soon as the government has finished with the banks, a stress test for restaurants might be in order, and the ones in east SoHo and on the Lower East Side, which have burgeoned roughly in step with bank branches, should be first in line. Some may turn out to be engaged in the productive and viable business of feeding people, but it will emerge that many, based on blind optimism and unacceptable levels of risk, are stuck with assets (and food) that are undoubtedly toxic. Delicatessen isn't the worst of them, but it demonstrates many of the faults of the neighborhood: style over substance, a poorly designed menu, and indifferent execution.

As the name suggests, Delicatessen is a jokey homage to the old Jewish deli—pastrami on wry—though the concept doesn't extend much further than pastrami and Reuben sandwiches. (A matzo-ball soup was dropped some months back.) Instead, the restaurant's guiding principle, proclaimed on its menu, is "international comfort food," which means easy, predictable dishes with little twists here and there. One such twist comes in cheeseburger spring rolls, a dish that sounds so misconceived you feel you have to try it. Without the tangy vegetable component of regular spring rolls, there is nothing to relieve the fatty blandness of wrapper, meat, and cheese. When you bite into one end, grease spills out of the other. One would have to be very drunk to enjoy this dish, and, to that purpose, the cocktails here are excellent. Similarly, the mac and cheese appears to be exactly that: pasta soused in melted cheese with no evidence of any attempt to create a sauce. Mahimahi is over-salted and no match for the garlic in a side of sticky rice. Such inversions abound: a dish of mustard arrives atop a pork chop, accompanied by a helping of salt with a hint of kale and a side of butter garnished with grits.

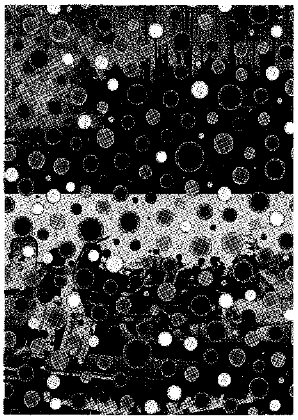
But the food isn't really the point here. If Topshop were a restaurant, it would be this restaurant. The menu features pictures of random people in a style suggestive of Polaroids taken at a party. Downstairs is a lounge with low couches, low lighting, and a d.j. who keeps music pounding throughout the restaurant. At a recent Sunday brunch, the club-ready waitstaff—all Mohicans and triceps and tattoos—sang along to A-ha and George Harrison and danced as they went about their work. People enjoyed the display, and, for all its faults, Delicatessen has judged its market well. One quiet evening, a man eating alone spoke highly of the place and said that he was a regular. His girth gave some indication of the effects of such a regimen. (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $11-$27).

—*Leo Carey*

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GIFT ECONOMY

In 2005, the Judith Rothschild Foundation gave MOMA more than twenty-five hundred drawings by six hundred and fifty contemporary artists, acquired at a binge-buying pace since 2003. The elegantly installed "Compass in Hand" débuts some three hundred and fifty pieces, selected by Christian Rattemeyer and Connie Butler. Don't look for surprises. Nearly every name—from Carl Andre to Andrea Zittel—is a well-worn notch on the art-circuit belt, and, at times, status seems to trump strength. (Why line a whole wall with meek diagrams by the usually scathing Cady Noland?) Energy surges with the young and convention-bending (Jim Lambie's spiky mural of eyes without a face; Kelley Walker's lapidary Warholian disasters, updated for digerati). The Rothschild collection is long on rookies; maybe next time, MOMA will take its cue from a drawing in the show by the conceptual wag Allen Ruppersberg. It reads, "Honey, I rearranged the collection using artists whom we know virtually nothing about."

—*Andrea K. Scott*



KELLEY WALKER/MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/JUDITH ROTHSCHILD FOUNDATION (DETAIL)

all the more so in this dramatic installation, with each picture individually lit in a darkened gallery. Through June 20. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

HANNAH STARKEY
The London-based artist photographs women as if she found them on a stroll through the city: looking out a shop window, seated in a café, hesitating on the street. But these seemingly casual moments are staged, and the bland self-consciousness of the work tends to weigh it down. A group of fourteen smaller images of women in sunglasses (they echo both early Richard Prince and recent Miroslav Tichy) look more spontaneous, but seem slight and pointless. Because one or two of these photographs have dramatic tension and directorial flair, the stilted air of the rest of the show is especially puzzling. Through June 20. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

Short List

ALICE ATTIE: Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081. Through May 23. **SOPHIE CALLE:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through June 6. **SARAH CHARLESWORTH:** Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111. Through June 13. **CHUCK CLOSE:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through June 20. **LEONARD FREED:** Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930. Through June 13. **HUANG YONG PING:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Through July 31. **ALEX KATZ:** Pace Wildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through June 13. **LAUREL NAKADATE:** Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450. Through July 24. **ALICE NEEL:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Opens May 14. **NAM JUNE PAIK:** James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Through May 30. **PABLO PICASSO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through June 6. **CHARLES RAY:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through June 27. **LARA SCHNITGER:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through June 20. **JESSICA STOCKHOLDER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through June 13. **CHEYNEY THOMPSON:** Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Through June 20. **"CONSTRUCTIVISMES":** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through May 30.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

RAY MORTENSON
Mortenson's small black-and-white photographs of Manhattan have so many precedents that they already look comfortably familiar. Berenice Abbott's pictures of the city in the nineteen-thirties provide a key template for his images of skyscrapers sweeping upward. Even if the buildings here are virtually featureless International Style monoliths, the work has a classic sense of restraint and a traditionalist's eye for elegant composition. But there's nothing retro to Mortenson's cityscapes (nearly all from 2008); they're muscular and crisp and smartly varied, including pictures of the underside of an overpass, a lone skater at Rockefeller Center, and incidental sidewalk shadows that put hulking monuments into perspective. Through May 29. (Borden, 560 Broadway at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

SAUL BECKER / ILANA HALPERIN / FRANCESCO SIMETI
If this show had a title, it might be "Vesuvius at Home"—the artists all contemplate the wilds of nature from studios in New York. Becker electroplates weeds he collected from industrial areas of Brooklyn and installs them in rock-salt-lined glass cases (the best feature eerie soundscapes by Stephen Vitiello). Simeti digitally transforms drawings by Italian mental patients, based on Audubon's "Birds of America" into colorful wallpaper, then undermines the project's lighthearted success with a bleakly literal sculpture of a tree. Halperin's work is the most strictly Vesuvian: among the objects she displays in a Beuysian vitrine is a "lava stamping implement" made of steel purported to withstand two-thousand-degree heat. Through June 6. (Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 212-226-3970.)

Short List

VERNE DAWSON: Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through June 20. **LIZ DESCHENES:** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through June 14. **ALBERTO GIACOMETTI:** Freeman, 560 Broadway at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through June 27. **KARL HAENDEL:** Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290. Through June 20. **MICHELLE HANDELMAN:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through May 31. **JUTTA KOETHER:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through May 24. **MARILYN MINTER:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through June 13. **CARRIE MOYER:** Canada, 55 Chrystie St. 212-925-4631. Through June 7. **MATT SHERIDAN SMITH:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through May 24. **"OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS":** K.S. Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918. Through May 30.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
City Ballet holds its spring gala, and unveils two new ballets. "Quasi una Fantasia," set to Górecki, is by the company principal and rising choreographer Benjamin Millepied; "Toccata" is by the Czech-born Jiří Bubeníček, who dances with the Dresden SemperOper Ballet, and whose twin, Otto, also a dancer, composed the score. The week also features Peter Martins's fast-paced, somewhat brutal staging of "Romeo + Juliet," from 2007. ♦ May 13 at 7 (Gala): "Quasi una Fantasia," "Toccata," and "Theme and Variations." ♦ May 14 at 8: "Scotch Symphony," "Tarantella," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," and "Concerto DSCH." ♦ May 15-16 at 8, May 17 at 3, and May 19 at 7:30: "Romeo + Juliet." ♦ May 16 at 2: "The Four Temperaments," "Toccata," and "Firebird." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 21.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
The company's Met season is full of enticing goodies, including "On the Dnieper," a new ballet by the Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, who recently joined the company as artist-in-residence. Other things to look forward to: the farewell performance of the Georgian powerhouse Nina Ananiashvili (June 27, in "Swan Lake," of course) and a guest appearance by the Bolshoi ballerina Natalia Osipova. For the opening-night gala, on May 18, Ratmansky has created a pièce d'occasion, a solo for the departing Ananiashvili. Other treats include some jamming by Herbie Hancock and a passion-filled pas de deux from MacMillan's "Romeo and Juliet," danced by Diana Vishneva and Marcelo Gomes. ♦ May 18 at 6:30 (Gala): Highlights from the season. ♦ May 19 at 7:30 (All-Balanchine program): "Allegro Brillante," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Mozartiana," and "Theme and Variations." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 11.)

MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE COMPANY
Graham's "Clytemnestra," with the formidable Fang-yi Sheu as the tragic queen, alternates with a program combining Graham's ever-powerful "Sketches from Chronicle," "Errand Into the Maze," "Maple Leaf Rag," and "Lamentation Variations." (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. May 12-13 at 7:30, May 14 at 7, May 15 at 8, and May 16 at 2 and 8.)

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS
Williams's portrait gallery of male saints, seventeen strong, has fantastical costumes and puppetry, a cast of some of the most interesting dancers in New York, and a concurrent concert of medieval music. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 12-16 at 7:30.)

MOMIX
"Go green" is the message of "Botanica," Moses Pendleton's newest work for his troupe of illusionist dancers, at the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 12-13 and May 19 at 7:30, May 14-15 at 8, May 16 at 2 and 8, and May 17 at 2 and 7:30. Through May 31.)

HIROAKI UMEDA
The work of the Japanese soloist is part hip-hop, part Butoh, which means that his expert, staccato undulations build very slowly. The integration of multimedia—flashes of light, cracklings of electronic noise, blackouts, silence, all precisely timed—is highly sophisticated. In one dance, Umeda inhabits a computerized environment, its bright-lined geometry reminiscent of "Tron." His very movements are full of special effects, live manipulations that suggest a DVD image skipping. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. May 14-16 at 7:30.)

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
The première at Bard last year of "Romeo & Juliet, on Motifs of Shakespeare" (débuting in Manhattan this week) was puzzling. One expected the lovers not to die (an ending proscribed by Prokofiev's recently rediscovered original score and scenario), but one didn't expect the choreography to seem so under-inspired, so willful in its refusal to provide balletic satisfactions. The very vehemence of the critical response—critics denying Morris a musical ear, defenders making much of subtleties in the cross-gender casting—recommended the work as a test case of sensibility, worth another look. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. May 14-16 at 8 and May 17 at 3.)

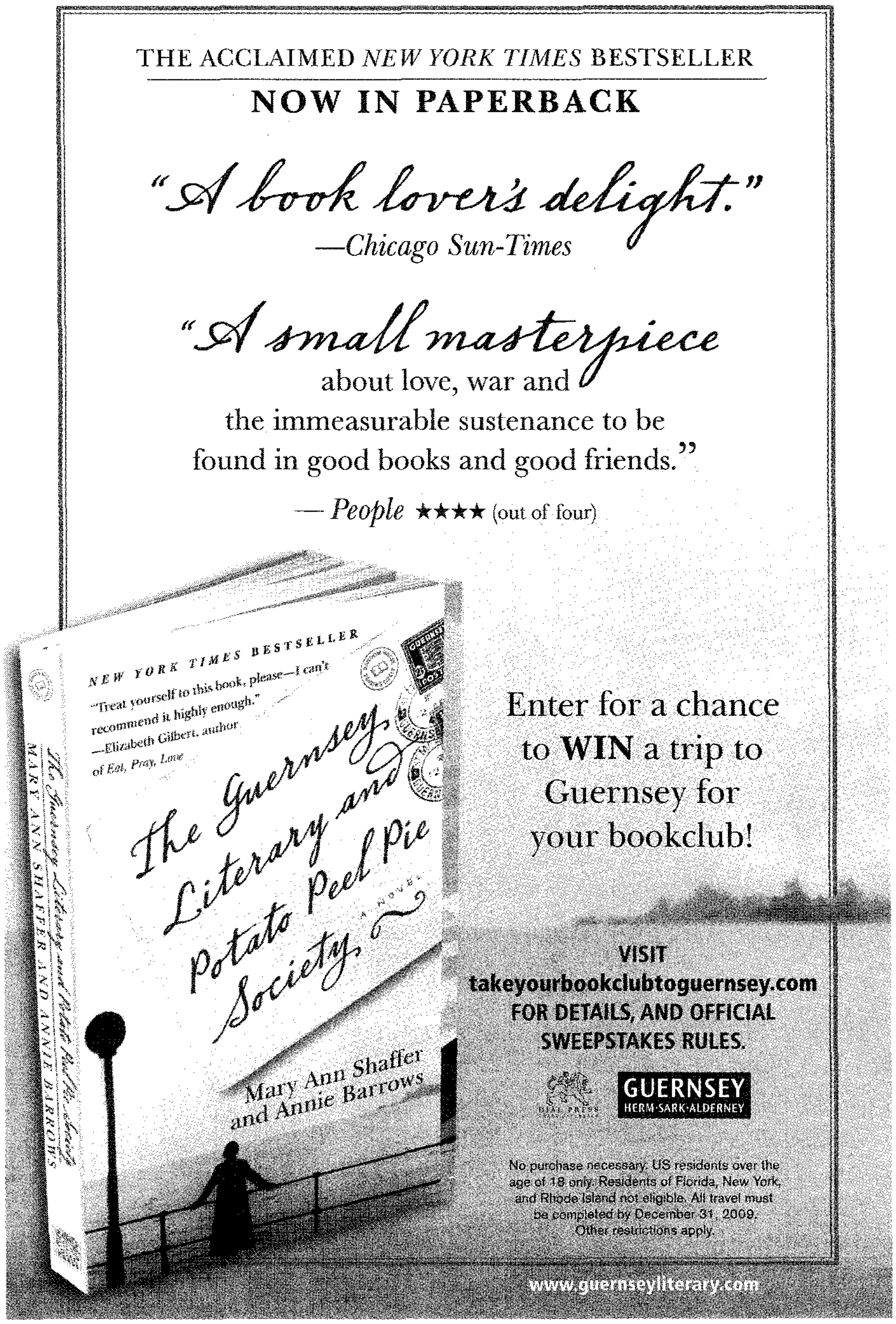
AYNSLEY VANDENBROUCKE MOVEMENT GROUP
"3 Dancers, 4 Chairs, 26 Words" is as advertised. An investigation into the relative abstractions of movement and verbal language, it's a kind of cross between refrigerator-magnet poetry and musical chairs. Since the twenty-six words include "man," "woman," and "child," along with "sea," "grave," and "flying," a story keeps coalescing. The word "touch" shouldn't necessarily turn the story into one of longing, but it does. (Center for Performance Research, 361 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. 212-868-4444. May 14-17 at 8.)

JOAQUÍN CORTÉS
Cortés is the Michael Flatley of flamenco—at once a real virtuoso, versed in tradition, and a vulgar purveyor of bravado, spectacle, and cheese. The Córdoba-born Gypsy is often shirtless and something of a sex symbol, as famous for his celebrity romances as for his dancing. "Calé," a retrospective of his dances from the past twenty years, joins two new pieces on the program. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 800-745-3000. May 14 at 8.)

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY
This is the last of the "Beacon Events," which, for financial reasons, have been reduced from eight to seven. It will also be the last chance to see three veteran dancers—Koji Mizuta, Daniel Squire, and the sizzling Holley Farmer—who have been cut from the company's roster. The performances are sold out, but there will be a waiting list at the museum on the day of the show. (Dia: Beacon, 3 Beekman St., Beacon, N.Y. 845-440-0100. May 16 at 2 and 4:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

VERTICAL PLAYER REPERTORY: "DER ROSENKAVALIER"
Count on Judith Barnes's edgy little company to give the old scenes-and-arias formula a twist. In "Der Rosenkavalier: The True Story," the dramatic emphasis is put not on the young lovers but on the fumbling and mendacious Baron Ochs (now a speaking role, with the actor Paul Hecht). (219 Court St., Cobble Hill, Brooklyn. 800-646-0686. May 15 at 8 and May 17 at 4.)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ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
His triumphant tenure with the Los Angeles Philharmonic may be over, but Esa-Pekka Salonen will be a presence on the world's leading podiums for decades to come. He returns to the New York Philharmonic this week, first in a "rush hour" concert featuring Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with the decisive Christian Tetzlaff) and Lutoslawski's Concerto for Orchestra. (May 13 at 6:45.) ♦ The full program includes the Lutoslawski and Szymanowski pieces, along with Sibelius's transcendent Fifth Symphony. (May 14 at 7:30 and May 16 at 8.) ♦ Salonen also conducts the Fifth Symphony in an "Inside the Music" presentation, with the performance preceded by a talk about Sibelius and his work (with photography by Petri Krook) given by Gerard McBurney. (May 15 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

STAATSKAPELLE BERLIN: THE MAHLER SYMPHONIES
Has New York ever seen the like? Carnegie Hall gives over its schedule to this remarkable ensemble, which plays with a lustrous, relaxed Old World sound. The final round of Mahler symphonies is conducted by Daniel Barenboim, the orchestra's impassioned music director, and Pierre Boulez—equal in fame, opposite in temperament. May 13 at 8: Barenboim conducts the "Songs of a Traveling Journeyman" (with the persuasive Thomas Hampson) and the Symphony No. 7 in E Minor, the most recalcitrant—yet still rewarding—of the Master's works. ♦ May 15 at 8: The coolheaded Boulez takes the measure of Mahler's grandiloquent Symphony No. 8, the so-called "Symphony of a Thousand." The solo singers include Christine Brewer, Michelle DeYoung, Hanno Müller-Brachmann, and Robert Holl, joined by the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the American Boychoir. ♦ May 16 at 8: An autumnal mood invades the final two concerts, both conducted by Barenboim. First comes "The Song of the Earth" (with DeYoung and the tenor Klaus Florian Vogt), preceded by a performance of the harrowing Adagio from the (unfinished) Tenth Symphony. ♦ May 17 at 2: The series draws to a close with a performance of the magnificent Ninth Symphony. (212-247-7800.)

PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF THE AMERICAS
Alondra de la Parra's vibrant young orchestra, devoted to the music and musicians of the Western Hemisphere, features the Mexican-Basque violinist Elena Urioste in its latest concert, a traversal of works by John Adams, Samuel Barber (the Violin Concerto), Bernstein (the Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story"), and the Brazilian master M. Camargo Guarnieri. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-671-4050. May 14 at 7.)

ST. THOMAS CHOIR: "PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE"
Rossini's late, eccentric masterpiece—neither small nor solemn, as one wag put it—for chorus with piano and harmonium, shares the program with a new work, "Spires," by Scott Eyerly, in the renowned Anglican choir's latest concert. John Scott conducts. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. www.saintthomaschurch.org. May 14 at 7:30.)

"SCHUBERT & SOLITUDE"
"She Was Here," an evocative orchestration of four songs by Schubert by Osvaldo Golijov (originally made for Dawn Upshaw, here sung by Tehila Nini Goldstein), is the touchstone of this program offered by the dynamic Knights chamber orchestra and the string quartet Brooklyn Rider, in a collaboration with N.Y.U.'s New York Institute for the Humanities. Golijov discusses the music with Fred Child in a concert that also features searching works by Ives, Glass, and Beethoven and more Schubert (the Quartet No. 14, "Death and the Maiden"). (Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk St. May 15 at 8. No tickets required.)

CONCERTO KÖLN: "ATHALIA"
Handel's English oratorio from 1733, based on Racine's Old Testament play, is offered at Alice Tully Hall by the storied German period-instrument band, in league with the Balthasar Neumann Choir. The vocal soloists include the estimable Simone Kermes (a favorite with the Venice Baroque Orchestra) and Iestyn Davies; Ivor Bolton conducts. (212-721-6500. May 16 at 8.)

MELODIA: "VISIONS OF ETERNITY"
"Trois Petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine," Messiaen's pungent wartime cantata, receives a rare New York performance by the women's choir, with the violinist Miranda Cuckson and the ondes Martenot player Françoise Murail featured in the orchestra; works by Caplet, Fauré (the lovely "Cantique de Jean Racine"), and Reza Vali complete the program. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 800-838-3006. May 16 at 8.)

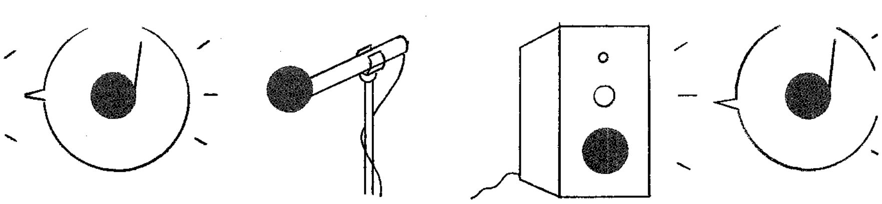
SIGNAL: MUSIC BY PHILIP GLASS
(Le) Poisson Rouge, downtown's prime venue for classical club concerts, is a natural spot for this program of music by Philip Glass. Brad Lubman conducts the expert young new-music band in Glass's Symphony No. 3 (for strings) and a suite from his score for the film "The Hours" (with the pianist Michael Riesman). (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. May 17 at 8.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
In one of two appearances at the floating chamber-music series this week, the dynamic cellist Matt Haimovitz joins the violinist Andy Simionescu, the violist Dimitri Murrath, and the pianist Navah Perlman in a concert of music by Schumann (including the Piano Quartet) and Brahms (the Sonata No. 1 in E Minor for Cello and Piano). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. May 13 at 8. For complete listings, see www.bargemusic.org.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The Society offers its final concerts of the season. May 14 at 6:30 and 9:30: The distinguished violinist Cho-Liang Lin joins several superb young colleagues (including the pianist Inon Barnatan and the cellist Julie Albers) for a concert featuring two of the great piano trios—Beethoven's "Archduke" and Brahms's Trio No. 1 in B Major. (Rose Studio, Rose Building.) ♦ May 17 at 5 and May 19 at 8: The curtain comes down with "Mendelssohn at 200," a program that includes the String Quintet in B-Flat Major, the Piano Trio in C Minor, and the Concertpiece No. 2 for Clarinet, Basset Horn, and Piano, performed by (among others) the violinist Ani Kavafian, the violist Paul Neubauer, the clarinettists David Shifrin and Jose Franch-Ballester, and a notable guest artist, the pianist Jeremy Denk. (Alice Tully Hall.) (212-875-5788.)

"NICK HALLETT: VOICE AND LIGHT SYSTEMS"
Hallett, given a monthlong residency at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, devotes four concerts to composers who specialize in joining the primal power of the human voice to the latest innovations of technology. This week brings a masterpiece: Stockhausen's "Stimmung," a spellbinding seventy-five-minute work for vocal sextet based on a single, luminous chord. (235 Bowery. www.newmuseum.org. May 14 at 7.)



LAURENT CILLUFFO

POP NOTES
LIVING DOLLS

The achievements of the original New York Dolls are difficult to describe and impossible to equal. The two records that the band made in the early seventies threw together fifties rock and roll, girl-group pop, kitsch, and glam in a recipe that was not necessarily nutritious but was very good for you; the singer David Johansen and the guitarist Johnny Thunders were the proto-punk Jagger and Richards, at least, on songs like "Trash," "Pills," "Personality Crisis," and "Frankenstein." But while the Stones were built to last, the Dolls were built to shatter, which they did in 1975, and Thunders's drug-related death (possibly a murder), in 1991, seemed like final, indisputable punctuation.

But beneath the burn-the-candle-to-the-ground debauchery and trash-as-treasure aesthetic was a highly professional outfit, driven mostly by Johansen, who went on to a successful career as a solo artist (with a string of fine records) and a faux solo artist (as the popular Buster Poindexter). Spurred on by Morrissey, who had been a fan of the band as a teen-ager, Johansen re-formed the Dolls in 2004 as a touring concern with the two other surviving members—the guitarist Syl Sylvain and the bassist Arthur (Killer) Kane. Though Kane died a month later, from leukemia, Johansen and Sylvain rallied to release the first official Dolls studio album in three decades, "One Day It Will Please Us to Remember Even This."

That record was a nice updating of the Dolls sound—more than a little older, possibly a little wiser—but it is the second album by New York Dolls 2.0, "'Cause I Sez So" (Atco) that shows the band at its full power. In part, that's because it's another reunion—the album was produced by Todd Rundgren, who worked on the band's first album in 1973. It's also because the reunited Dolls, who have now been together longer than the original group, sound completely at ease, whether snarling out the title track or strutting through the soul pastiche of "Nobody Got No Bizness." This is a gentler Dolls, right down to the sweet island-flavored remake of "Trash," but the unhinged closing track, "Exorcism of Despair," which directly echoes the Angels' "My Boyfriend's Back," proves there's still gas in the tank. To characterize the band as canny veterans is faintly insulting: rather, they are devotees, pious about their rock-and-roll faith and determined to perform its sacraments with the requisite lack of solemnity. "'Cause I Sez So" is more than anyone had any reason to hope for from the band in 2009. So where to from here? Onward and upward, hopefully. As everyone knows, some dolls increase in value the older they get.

—Ben Greenman

"MUSIC AT THE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY": JANET MAGUIRE
Maguire has had an interesting life: a student of the Darmstadt modernist school, a music critic for the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune*, and a longtime resident of Venice, she comes to the U.S. to take in a performance of several of her works for strings and piano (including "Invenzione" and "Frills") offered by the Sonic Crossroads ensemble. (10 E. 18th St. 212-924-7882. May 16 at 8.)

GUARNERI STRING QUARTET
Few ensembles loom larger on the landscape of American chamber music than this renowned foursome, which is retiring this year. In what will be their final concert at the Metropolitan Museum, the musicians invite the original cellist, David Soyer, to join them in a program of music by Beethoven (the Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 127) and Schubert (the String Quintet in C Major). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. May 16 at 8.)

CONCERTANTE
The vibrant string sextet, at its longtime home, Merkin Concert Hall, performs music by Beethoven, Schoenberg ("Verklärte Nacht"), and the young composer Kevin Puts ("Arcana," a semi-concerto in which the formidable cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach has a prominent role). (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 18 at 7:30.)

"KEYS TO THE FUTURE"
Joseph Rubinstein's annual celebration of the contemporary piano begins a three-night run with a concert that features performances from such front-rank soloists as Lisa Moore, Blair McMillen, and Marina Lomazov, who offer works by Aaron Jay Kernis, John Adams (the brilliant "American Berserk"), and Radiohead (arranged by Christopher O'Riley), among others. (Renee Weiler Concert Hall, 46 Barrow St. May 19 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MOVIES OPENING

ANGELS AND DEMONS
A thriller, directed by Ron Howard, in which a Harvard professor (Tom Hanks) discovers an apocalyptic secret at the Vatican. Co-starring Ayelet Zurer and Ewan McGregor. Opening May 15. (In wide release.)

BIG MAN JAPAN
A comedy, directed by Hitoshi Matsumoto, about a bedraggled superhero living in a Tokyo slum. In Japanese. Opening May 15. (In limited release.)

THE BIG SHOT-CALLER
Marlene Rhein directed and co-stars in this drama, about an aspiring dancer (David Rhein) who moves in with his sister. Opening May 15. (Quad Cinema.)

THE BROTHERS BLOOM
Adrien Brody stars as Bloom, one of a family of con men who is taken in by a strange millionaire (Rachel Weisz). Co-starring Rinko Kikuchi and Mark Ruffalo and directed by Rian Johnson. Opening May 15. (In limited release.)

JERICHOW
A thriller, directed by Christian Petzold and based on James M. Cain's novel "The Postman Always Rings Twice," about a romantic triangle that turns violent. In German. Opening May 15. (Film Forum.)

MANAGEMENT
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 15. (In wide release.)

O'HORTEN
Bent Hamer directed this comedy, about an engineer who misses his train and stumbles into strange adventures. In Norwegian. Opening May 15. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

SUMMER HOURS
A drama, directed by Olivier Assayas, about a family that must consider selling its ancestral home. Starring Juliette Binoche and Charles Berling. In French. Opening May 15. (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL
Anybody schooled in "This Is Spinal Tap" could be forgiven for assuming that there was no further amusement, let alone rarer emotions, to be mined from heavy metal. Somehow, though, Sacha Gervasi's documentary digs deep into a real-life case—the attempted resurrection of Anvil, which was founded in the early nineteen-seventies and banged heads with fame in the eighties—to emerge with a saga of devotion and perseverance that seems at once touching and absurd. Gervasi is especially fortunate in having the founding fathers of the group, Robb Reiner and Steve (Lips) Kudlow, now in creased middle age, to guide us through its many downs and very occasional ups. The action stretches from their native Canada to Transylvania, via Japan and Stonehenge (the last being an obvious must-see for any Druid-haired rocker). By the end, to our surprise, we mind very much whether the fortunes of Anvil are set to soar or doomed to lurch once more; if most of their music sounds like a fight in a lumber mill, who cares?—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/20/09.) (In limited release.)

DAVID GOLDER
The all too common link of anti-plutocratic populism and anti-Semitism is on fulsome display in this grotesque, overheated, and fascinating French melodrama, from 1930. Harry Baur delivers a mighty performance in the title role, as a Jewish immigrant who made a fortune through brilliance and bluster and seizes the chance to crush a former partner as revenge for past wrongs. Felled by heart trouble, he withdraws to his villa in Biarritz, where his frivolous daughter, Joyce (Jackie Monnier), and his concupiscent, adulterous wife, Gloria (Paule Andral), cavort in casinos and pump him mercilessly for money with no regard for his health. (In a brilliant bit of set design, the master bedroom is as bare and grim as the characters' inner lives, and its roof beams loom menacingly above their heads like gallows). Mean-spirited, craven, and selfish behavior dominates throughout, as in the novel of the same title, by Irène Némirovsky, on which the film is based. The director, Julien Duvivier, offers some inspired images, bold lighting effects, and an audacious disjunction of picture and sound. He also finds every possible angle from which to emphasize hook noses and frizzy hair along with bald pates, double chins, and fat behinds; the film's most telling detail concerns a fabulously wealthy Old World Jew, Soifer (Paul Franceschi), who walks on tiptoe so as not to wear out the heels of his shoes. In French.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; May 13.)

"Dovima with Sacha, Cloche and Suit by Balenciaga, Café des Deux Magots, Paris, August, 1955," by Richard Avedon, in "Avedon Fashion 1944-2000," at I.C.P.

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IL DIVO
An elegant reunion for Paolo Sorrentino and Toni Servillo, the director and the star of "The Consequences of Love." In this case, the phlegmatic Servillo plays Giulio Andreotti—seven times Prime Minister of Italy, and an inextinguishable force at the heart of the country's politics. Try to imagine Nosferatu on the threshold of the Vatican and you come close to the bewitching figure that Servillo delivers here; he appears to glide rather than walk, to scorn minor sins in favor of larger conspiracy, and to taste each occurrence (even when it threatens his own position) for its comic savor. By the end, you can't say you know him, but you can't get enough of him, either. The movie that spins around him feels, perhaps unavoidably, less refined; Sorrentino flourishes the secondary characters in style, but he allows the complexities of parliamentary scheming—and of Andreotti's reputed links to the Mafia—to splinter into fast, unmanageable fragments. If we can't hope to be enlightened, he seems to suggest, we might as well be dazed and confused. In Italian.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

FIGHTING
As a picture about the sullen art of bare-knuckle boxing—scratch-and-claw combat without rules—it's a fake. The movie's language is chaste, and the fights, staged in back alleys, hidden rooms, and half-finished apartments, may look violent at first glance, but the actual blows and the pain of battle are hidden by tricky editing or just ignored. The hero, Shawn MacArthur (Channing Tatum), after being thrown down on cement and flung

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SWEET SORROW

Mark Morris's version of "Romeo and Juliet" is set not to the familiar version (1940) of Prokofiev's famous score, but to an earlier version (1935), in which Romeo and Juliet do not die. Prokofiev was a Christian Scientist,

KYLE T. WEBSTER

and Christian Scientists believe that there is no such thing as death. When the body stops working, you just ascend to a higher realm, and that's what the star-crossed lovers do in Prokofiev's original libretto. Soon after he finished the score, however, Stalin's Terror began, and the Soviet artistic enforcers made the composer change his non-canonical ending. Morris, using the original score, has changed it back. But don't expect Romeo and Juliet to settle down in Verona. In the words of Simon Morrison, the musicologist who discovered the 1935 score while researching his book "The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years" (2008), they walk off into "a C-major Heaven." Morris, likewise, says not to look for a happily-ever-after. "It's just not a murder-suicide ending." "Romeo"—humble and exalted, as is Morris's way—will play at the Rose Theatre May 14-17.

—*Joan Acocella*

against display cases and whatever other furniture happens to be around, shows up the next day with no more than a few decorative bruises on his face. Still, it's a decent commercial entertainment. The independent-film director Dito Montiel ("A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints"), who wrote "Fighting" with Robert Munic, is from New York, and he has a feel for the hostile atmosphere of the after-hours city—the plug-ugly types lounging outside of some crooked convenience store; the furtive activity of fight-scene hustlers, brokers, and middle men; the fey, knowing sarcasm of the professional gamblers. With Terrence Howard as a saddened, philosophical street operator named Harvey Boarden, a gent who barely survives in the urban muck, and Zulay Henao as the vulnerable young single mother the hero falls for.—*David Denby* (5/11/09) (In wide release.)

KING LEAR
The cinema is born of two things, invention and sacrifice. On Easter Sunday, Jean-Luc Godard—as Professor Pluggy, a solitary inventor striving to re-invent the image—makes the petals pop back onto the flowers of spring through the miracle of reverse photography and expires from the effort. Thus is the cinema reborn, the natural order restored—and thus, in the first image of this new cinema, Cordelia (Molly Ringwald) dies, her body stretched on a boulder by the shores of Lake Geneva, as, with his back to her, Lear (Burgess Meredith) beholds the wonders of nature in all their ruthless beauty. The cinema is born of three things: invention, sacrifice, and mourning. This 1987 film is Godard's maximally pressurized condensation of his great themes: his manifesto of the image, a lost world of art (including, of course, the cinema), the hazardous bonds of paternity. The casting alone proclaims the magnitude of his ambition: not only Meredith and Ringwald but Norman Mailer and his daughter Kate, Julie Delpy, Woody Allen, and, decisively, Peter Sellars as William Shakespeare, Jr., the Fifth, sent by the Queen of England to rediscover the works of his ancestor, which were lost along with all culture in the wake of Chernobyl. This comic setup mocks the notion of filming "King Lear" as if it were a ready-made screenplay. There is no film of "King Lear"—indeed, no act of art—that is not a rediscovery, no image of nature that is not a resurrection. In English, French, Russian, and Shakespearean.—*R.B.* (BAM; May 15.)

THE LIMITS OF CONTROL
The end credits of the new Jim Jarmusch film read like paintings in a catalogue: "Nude," "Blonde," "Lone Man," and so on: an appropriate echo, since the movie itself is sprinkled with works of art, most of them studied on the walls of Spanish galleries by the loner at its center. As played by Isaach De Bankolé, he has no name but, by way of compensation, does have a fine selection of suits, in which he travels to Madrid, Seville, and elsewhere, hooking up with mysterious contacts, exchanging codes and diamonds, and gradually inching toward his ultimate (and surprisingly violent) task. The cityscapes, in particular, are shot with acuity and wit by the cinematographer Christopher Doyle, who pushes them to the brink of abstraction, and the supporting cast, which includes Gael García Bernal, Bill Murray, and Tilda Swinton, could hardly be hipper, or more tuned in to the styles of movies past. The only question is: when a film about a cool fellow, on a cool mission, looks this cool, what is to prevent it from freezing into a series of attitudes? Jarmusch lacks for nothing in his dead-pan pastiche of spy thrillers, but some viewers may experience a residual, vulgar longing for the real thing. And you can't blame them.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (In limited release.)

MANAGEMENT
After small, precise turns in two other films this year ("The Great Buck Howard," "Sunshine Cleaning"), the great Steve Zahn gets a co-starring role, with Jennifer Aniston, in this slacker-like romantic comedy by the playwright Stephen Belber. Aniston plays Sue, a buttoned-down travelling saleswoman (she deals in decorative art), whose obsessions over charitable causes help spare her any emotional self-involvement. Zahn is Mike, a sweet, prospect-less manager who works at his parents' modest Arizona motel. When Sue checks into the motel, it's love at first sight for Mike, and he begins pursuing her on a cross-country trip to win her love. The film is indifferently shot and at times has the feel of a theatre production, but there's nice supporting work from Woody Harrelson (as Sue's punk ex-boyfriend) and Margo Martindale (playing Mike's mom) to liven things up. There's also an affecting low-key tempo to Belber's dialogue that allows Aniston to bring some honest, focussed attention to her role. But above all, it's Zahn's puppy-dog charm that keeps the film scampering about amiably.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

MARNIE
Tippi Hedren's cool grace in "The Birds" hardly prepares a viewer for her porcelain froideur as a sexually traumatized kleptomaniac in Alfred Hitchcock's psychologically resonant, visually transcendent film, from 1964. Sean Connery co-stars as a businessman who hires Marnie as his secretary, lusts mightily after her, and, catching her with a hand in his till, takes it upon himself to win her heart—and, above all, her body—by healing her mind. Borrowing liberally from himself (notably, several tropes from "Spellbound," "Vertigo," and "Psycho"), Hitchcock gives his obsessions luridly free rein—intentionally and not. He was, in fact, obsessed with Hedren, whose rejections he repaid with harsh treatment, and it shows in his images: few films have looked as longingly and as relentlessly at a woman, few onscreen gazes at an actress have so perfectly crystallized an integral and unique style of performance, and few performances have so precisely defined a director's world view, even unto the vanishing point. He could, and did, go no further.—*R.B.* (BAM; May 16.)

SIN NOMBRE
This modest epic of immigration is heightened by the brilliant filmmaking of the director Cary Joji Fukunaga (it's his first feature film). The drama—featuring interwoven stories about Honduran teen-agers trying to emigrate to the U.S. by any means necessary (and ultimately facing off with Mexican gangs who rob and kill illegal immigrants on their way north)—is so vividly constructed that it achieves an almost thriller-like urgency. The cast of young, unknown actors (including Paulina Gaitan and Edgar Flores) is a gifted wild bunch, and the performances are rooted in a naturalistic display of emotions that never feels forced. The film is sometimes dark and brutal, but it has a measure of grace and classical composition (the wide-screen images are remarkable) that carry the story along to a moving conclusion. In Spanish.—*B.D.* (In limited release.)

THE SOLOIST
A star reporter for the Los Angeles *Times*, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), befriends a classically trained musician, Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), who suffers from schizophrenia and lives on the Los Angeles streets. Downey approaches him with a mixture of professional curiosity and practiced caution. In return, Foxx doesn't look at him much. Turning away, he talks rapidly and lightly, praising Beethoven, always Beethoven, complete with opus numbers. He's not dangerous, but he's not sane, either, and the filmmakers—the screenwriter Susannah Grant (adapting Lopez's book) and the director Joe Wright—don't pretend that friendship can cure madness or that great music can heal wounds that have been open for years. Wright flies over L.A.'s tangled freeways like the angels hovering over Berlin in "Wings of Desire," and he turns Nathaniel's attendance at rehearsals of the Los Angeles Philharmonic into a bliss-out. But then he comes back to earth. Outside a shelter, the director assembles what seems like every lost and wrecked person in the city and halts the story to let them tell their tales. They make their own kind of music. Most of the rest is from Beethoven's Third and Ninth Symphonies. It's hard to see how music and a sympathetic reporter can redeem a messy American city, but this movie makes a plausible case for so fervent a dream.—*D.D.* (4/27/09) (In wide release.)

STAR TREK
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

TYSON
After seeing this fascinating James Toback documentary about Mike Tyson, one can never again think of the fighter as a simpleminded thug. He's a very complex-minded thug indeed, full of contradictions, which he articulates with considerable detail and feeling. The man we see is sad and vulnerable and ferocious all at once—frightened as a virtually parentless boy in Brooklyn who was robbed by neighborhood kids, then remorseless as a baby gangster robbing drug dealers. In detention in upstate New York, he was steered into boxing and wound up in the hands of the great trainer Cus D'Amato, who took him in, fathered him, and got him to concentrate his strength and rage into a relentless attack in which speed—a hail of punches—drives through his opponents' defenses. The rest is bravado, boasting, good and bad times with many women and hangers-on, enormous earnings (most of them blown), and wrenching self-criticism and self-abnegation. Toback doesn't press Tyson on the rape conviction that sent him to prison for three years. (Tyson claims he was innocent.) He lets Tyson speak at great length, and we are free to judge the self-mythologizing, which, however overblown, cannot blur the genuinely tragic story of an ignorant street kid's precipitous rise and disastrous fall.—*D.D.* (5/11/09) (In limited release.)

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
This noisy, undistinguished prequel to the "X-Men" series is mainly a fight film. The two warring mutant brothers, Liev Schreiber, a morose sadist with fangs, and Hugh Jackman, unhappy but ripped, fly at each other again and again, grappling, punching, slashing. Much of the combat is just a whirl of movement photographed up close. As the "X-Men" series has progressed, the startling and delicate poetic extravagances of the first film have given way to flesh-pounding brutishness; the men might be two angry Humvees at war. The story, devised by David Benioff and Skip Woods, is largely meaningless, and the emotions in the movie are no more than functional—they set up the next fight. With Danny Huston as the devious Colonel Stryker, who, claiming he can make Wolverine indestructible, dips him in a glass laboratory bathtub and injects a substance called adamantium into his veins. Naked, a buff Frankenstein's monster, Wolverine escapes, and Stryker tries to hunt him down. Various other mutants make brief appearances, to little effect. Directed by Gavin Hood.—*D.D.* (5/11/09) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

EARTH: In wide release. **HANNAH MONTANA THE MOVIE:** In wide release. **I LOVE YOU, MAN:** In wide release. **KNOWING:** In wide release. **MONSTERS VS. ALIENS:** In wide release. **OBSESSED:** In wide release. **17 AGAIN:** In wide release. **STATE OF PLAY:** In wide release. **VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Sergei Loznitsa. All films are in Russian. May 13-19 at 7:30: "Revue" (2008). ♦ May 13-19 at 9:30: "Blockade" (2006). ♦ May 16 at 5:30: "The Settlement" (2001). ♦ May 17 at 5:30: Short-film program, including "The Train Station" (2001). ♦ Films by Ken Jacobs. May 15-21 at 6:45 and 9:15: "Anaglyph Tom" (2008). ♦ May 16-17 at 4:30: "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son" (1969).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through May 21: "The Late Film." May 13 at 6:50 and 9:30: "7 Women" (1966, John Ford). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by the critic Elliott Stein. ♦ May 14 at 4:30 and 9:30: "A Talking Picture" (2003, Manoel de Oliveira; in Portuguese, French, Italian, English, and Greek). ♦ May 14 at 6:50: "And the Ship Sails On" (1983, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ May 15 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "King Lear" (†). ♦ May 16 at 3, 6, and 9: "Marnie" (†). ♦ May 17 at 3, 6, and 9: "The Duchess of Langeais" (2007, Jacques Rivette; in French). The 6 P.M. screening will be introduced by Miriam Bale, the co-curator of the series. ♦ May 18 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Good Morning" (1959, Yasujiro Ozu; in Japanese). ♦ May 19 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Track of the Cat" (1954, William A. Wellman).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—The Con Film Festival. May 13 at 1, 4:25, and 8:20: "Each Dawn I Die" (1939, William Keighley). ♦ May 13 at 2:50, 6:15, and 9:40: "20,000 Years in Sing Sing" (1933, Michael Curtiz). ♦ May 14 at 1:30, 5:25, and 9:20: "The Prisoner of Shark Island" (1936, John Ford). ♦ May 14 at 3:20 and 7:15: "Les Misérables" (1935, Richard Boleslawski). ♦ May 15 at 1:30, 5:35, and 9:40: "Caged" (1950, John Cromwell). ♦ May 15 at 3:20 and 7:25: "I Want to Live!" (1958, Robert Wise). ♦ May 16 at 1:30, 5:10, and 8:50: "Escape from Alcatraz" (1979, Don Siegel). ♦ May 16 at 3:35 and 7:15: "Riot in Cell Block 11" (1954, Siegel). ♦ May 17 at 1:30, 5:20, and 9:10 and May 18 at 1 and 4:50: "Sullivan's Travels" (1942, Preston Sturges). ♦ May 17 at 3:15 and 7:05 and May 18 at 2:45: "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" (2000, Joel Coen). ♦ May 19 at 1, 3:45, 6:30, and 9:15: "Birdman of Alcatraz" (1962, John Frankenheimer). ♦ The films of Tod Browning. May 18 at 6:35 and 9:35: "The Devil Doll" (1936). ♦ May 18 at 8:10: "Where East Is East" (1929).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—In première. May 13-14 and May 19 at 3 and 7; May 15 at 7; May 16-17 at 1, 4:45, and 8:15; and May 18 at 1: "Being Jewish in France" (2007, Yves Jeuland; in French).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"World Nomads Haiti." May 19 at 12:30 and 7: "Miss Body Plastik" (2008, Louis Ebby Angel; in Creole) and "Mrs. Little Bones" (2006, David Bell; in Creole and English). The 7 P.M. screening will be introduced by the directors. ♦ May 19 at 4: "Mrs. Little Bones" and "Anita" (1981, Rassoul Labuchin; in Creole and French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." May 15-16: "Full Metal Jacket" (1987, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. May 19 at 8: A tribute to the director Peter Davis.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Old West: Myth, Character, and Reinvention." May 13 and May 15 at 1:30: "Sunset" (1967, Andy Warhol) and "Imitation of Christ" (1967-69, Warhol). ♦ May 14 at 1:30: "Bike Boy" (1967, Warhol). ♦ Through May 23: The films of Kim Longinotto. May 13 at 4: "Runaway" (2001). ♦ May 13 at 7: "Gaea Girls" (2000). ♦ May 14 at 4: "Dream Girls" (1993, Longinotto and Jano Williams) and "Shinjuku Boys" (1995, Longinotto and Williams). ♦ May 14 at 7: "The Good Wife of Tokyo" (1992, Longinotto and Claire Hunt) and "Eat the Kimono" (1989, Longinotto and Hunt). ♦ May 15-16 at 4: "Divorce Iranian Style" (1998, Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini). ♦ May 15 at 4: "Hidden Faces" (1990, Longinotto and Hunt). ♦ Through May 28: The films of Julien Duvivier. Except where noted, all films are in French. May 13 at 4:30: "David Golder" (†). ♦ May 13 at 8 and May 16 at 5: "Au Bonheur des Dames" (1930; silent). ♦ May 14 at 4:30 and May 15 at 8: "La Fin du Jour" (1938). ♦ May 14 at 8: "Un Car-

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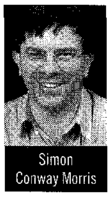

Simon Conway Morris

As I write this essay, my fingers hold a pen and my eyes scan the page— fingers that have evolved from fins, eyes that have developed from little more than pigmented spots. We may walk tall, but we cast a long evolutionary shadow. At the same time, my ears are distracted by bird-song from the yard outside. But why should I bother to waste my time listening to the birds?... CONTINUED ONLINE

Obviously, says the monkey.

Frans de Waal

Human nature simply cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of nature. This evolutionary approach is already difficult for many people to accept, but it is likely to generate even more resistance once its implications are fully grasped. After all, the idea that we descend from long-armed, hairy creatures is only half the message of evolutionary theory... CONTINUED ONLINE

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net de Bal" (1937). ♦ May 16 at 1:30 and May 18 at 8: "Pépé le Moko" (1937). ♦ May 17 at 2:30: "The Great Waltz" (1938).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 15 at 9:30: "Vertigo" (1958, Alfred Hitchcock).

READINGS AND TALKS

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
The architect Renzo Piano and the sculptor Mark di Suvero discuss their work. (225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. 212-685-0008. May 13 at 6:30.)

"THE EDGY MOTHERS READING"
The writers Jill Eisenstadt, Beth Harpaz, Mary Morris, Jenny Offill, Sophia Romero, Amy Sohn, Michele Madigan Somerville, and Diana Son share their take on motherhood. There's an open wine bar for a half hour before the reading. (The Old Stone House, J. J. Byrne Park, Fifth Ave. at 3rd St., Brooklyn. 718-768-3195. May 14 at 8.)

"SCHUBERT AND SOLITUDE"
The composer Osvaldo Golijov discusses his music and that of Franz Schubert with the radio host Fred Child as part of a concert presented by the Knights chamber orchestra and N.Y.U.'s New York Institute for the Humanities (see Classical Music). (Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk St. May 15 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

NATIONAL ARTS CLUB
The playwright and writer Donald Breckenridge reads from his latest novel, "You Are Here." He'll be joined by Lewis Warsh and Susan Daitch, who will read from their fiction and poetry. (15 Gramercy Park S. May 19 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WALL TO WALL BROADWAY"
Symphony Space presents twelve hours of music and more from the Great White Way. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 16, from 11 to 11.)

LIT CRAWL NYC
Drinking and writing have a long and storied history in this town (go ask the ghost of Dylan Thomas, or stop by the White Horse Tavern). Drinking and reading, less so. Lit Crawl NYC aims to change that. Now in its second year, it features nearly a dozen readings and talks by the likes of Michael Idov, Tony O'Neill, and Carrie McLaren, along with Jane Ganahl and Jack Boulware (co-founders of "Litquake," the San Francisco literary festival that inspired this event), at bars in the East Village and on the Lower East Side. (For more information, visit www.litquake.org/ny. May 16, starting at 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
As art auctions have struggled, the auction houses' emphasis on works fresh to the market has increased: there is still, it seems, a buyer for just the right piece at the right price. No surprise, then, that at **Christie's** evening sale of contemporary art (May 13), some of the top estimates are for works from a distinguished private collection, that of the patroness Betty Freeman, who died earlier this year. The top lot is in fact a portrait of Freeman by David Hockney, "Beverly Hills Housewife," in which she stands, statuesque in her pink caftan and platinum-blond bob, amid her art collection on the patio of her California Moderne manse; other works from this collection include pieces by Lichtenstein (the playful "Frolic"), Flavin, and Warhol. The house will also offer an electric Basquiat figure at its evening sale, the totemic "Mater," from 1982. Two day sales of contemporary art follow (May 14), with works by de Kooning, Thiebaud, and Dubuffet, among others. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ After an evening auction of contemporary art (May 12), **Sotheby's** offers a varied selection of lower-priced contemporary items (May 13), including photographs by Richard Prince and John Baldessari, drawings by Twombly and de Kooning, and Warhol silk screens. Then comes a day of African, Oceanic, and pre-Columbian objects (May 15), with the morning sale devoted to the collection of Chaim Gross (and his wife, Renée), assembled by the sculptor in the forties and fifties. It includes a rare and beautiful female kneeling figure from the Ivory Coast, as well as a Fang sculptural representation (actually a reliquary) of a muscular male figure. The general sale, held in the afternoon, is especially strong in Oceanic works; it is headlined by a four-foot-tall carving from Papua New Guinea of Iriwáke, the god of war and head-hunting, with impressive outstretched arms, once part of the Bussel collection, in Amsterdam. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The downtown auctioneer **Phillips**, which specializes in contemporary art, jumps into the fray with a two-part auction (May 14-15) that features a giant cereal box ("Untitled") by Robert Gober, master of the everyday object, and a late canvas by Philip Guston ("Anxiety") depicting two very Gustonian subjects, a telephone (source of anxiety) and an egg sandwich. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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Films by the Dardenne brothers, at Walter Reade.

TARA HARDY

ON THE HORIZON

ART
DRAMATIC FLAIR
May 22-Aug. 16

In the early twentieth century, the relationship between stage and set took a turn for the experimental. The dancer Serge Diaghilev and the artist Léon Bakst collaborated in Moscow; the director Max Reinhardt conceived a revolving stage in Berlin. In New York, the vaudeville tradition gave way to the uniquely American genre of musical theatre. The Morgan Library & Museum traces the history of these and other movements in "Creating the Modern Stage: Designs for Theater and Opera." (212-685-0008.)

MOVIES
DOUBLE TROUBLE
May 27-June 2

The Belgian brothers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne started making documentaries together in the seventies before turning their attention to fiction. Their dramas, such as "Rosetta" and "The Child," both of which won the grand prize at Cannes, feature characters in dire economic circumstances and equally parlous psychological ones; their rugged, confrontational realism is tinged with striking, resonant symbolism. The Film Society of Lincoln Center will present "Beyond 'L'Enfant,'" a complete retrospective of their work. (212-875-5610.)

THE THEATRE
A WORLD APART
June 1

The second production of Lincoln Center Theatre's LCT3 initiative, "Stunning" opens at the Duke on 42nd Street. In the drama by David Adjmi, a sixteen-year-old Syrian Jewish girl living in Brooklyn marries a much older man, only to find her life changed by his housekeeper. Anne Kauffman directs. (646-223-3010.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
NEW YORK NIGHTS
June 5-6 and June 9

Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble has played far and wide but never at Lincoln Center. In two concerts at Alice Tully Hall—and a free appearance in Damrosch Park—its virtuoso musicians (from eleven different countries) perform classical and traditional music from around the world. (212-721-6500.)

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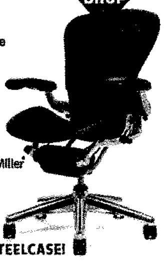

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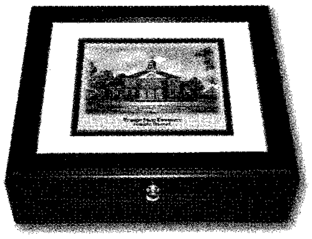

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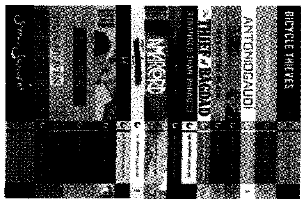

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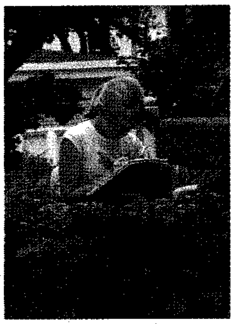

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THE
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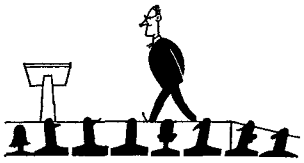
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
COLLEGE TRY

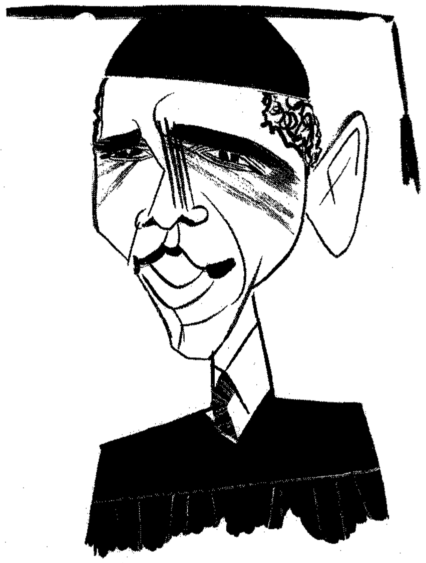


With summer almost here, and the green shoots on the ground (if not on the Dow) grown to leafy fullness, the White House has completed an annual springtime chore: choosing among the many invitations from colleges and universities for the boss to address the graduating class. This year, three were accepted. On May 13th, President Obama speaks at Arizona State University, in Tempe; four days later, at the University of Notre Dame, in South Bend, Indiana; and, five days after that, at the United States Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland.

In recent years politicians have been given a run for their money at commencement time by anchorpersons and Hollywood celebrities, but loftily placed public officials, especially those who can be credibly deemed statesmen, are still the most sought-after speakers—and the biggest "get" of all, of course, is the President of the United States. The President is a statesman ex officio, a guaranteed publicity magnet, and a person whose fame and entourage can bathe even the roomiest campus in a glowing aura of importance. (Another plus: Presidents don't demand speaking fees or airline tickets.) The feeling is mutual. Your statesman regards a campus backdrop and academic robes as the ideal stage set and costume for the utterance of large, grave thoughts. Winston Churchill was between prime ministerships when he delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College, in Fulton, Missouri, in 1946, but he was introduced by President Truman, which made the occasion official. A year later, Secretary of State George C. Marshall announced his plan for war-ravaged Europe under the trees of Harvard Yard. In 1963, President Kennedy chose commencement at American University, in Washington, D.C., as the venue for the speech, perhaps the finest of his Presidency, in which he called for a ban on nuclear tests in the atmosphere.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

If a President happens to have made himself detested—by starting or escalating a bloody, ill-conceived war, say—he is wise to limit his campus appearances to the service academies, where students and faculty alike are subject to military discipline and unlikely to be rude to a Commander-in-Chief, even one whose folly threatens their lives. But a merely unpopular President is normally a trouble-free choice—and Barack Obama is anything but unpopular, especially on campus. He's brainy, he writes books, he's pouring billions into education, his team bulges with professors and Nobelists (and the odd ex-president of Harvard), he follows March Madness, and his idea of a lucrative side job is teaching at a university—none of which explains why the first of his graduation-day bookings was met with a dis and the second with a Donnybrook.



As for the dis, Arizona State's lèse-majesté was less lèse than advertised. When word got out that the invitation did not include an honorary degree, Obama did not complain. Nevertheless, awkwardness ensued. A.S.U.'s president explained that his institution no longer confers honorary degrees on "sitting politicians." A university spokesperson unhelpfully pointed out that at A.S.U. honorary degrees are reserved for "someone who's really outstanding, who has made outstanding contributions in their field." Obama, whose field is being President, hasn't been on the job long enough to qualify. On the other hand, Obama will be A.S.U.'s first outside commencement speaker in thirty years, which is a big honor right there. And the university hastened to expand its main financial-aid program and rename it the President

Barack Obama Scholars Program. Despite the weather forecast—a hundred degrees and very, very sunny—an audience of sixty-five thousand is expected, Obama's largest since Inauguration Day.

Notre Dame planned from the start to confer an honorary doctorate on Obama, as it has done for eight of his predecessors, beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt. This only heightened the dudgeon of the American Catholic right. The loudest protests have been orchestrated by the Cardinal Newman Society, founded in 1993 and unconnected with the Newman Centers for Catholic students, which are a familiar sight on hundreds of campuses. The group describes itself as dedicated to strengthening "Catholic identity" at Catholic colleges and universities, "many" of which—including Notre Dame, apparently, the Gipper notwithstanding—embrace "a mistaken notion of academic freedom." It claims to have collected three hundred and fifty thousand names on a Web petition demanding that Notre Dame rescind its invitation and "halt this travesty immediately." Pat Buchanan chimed in, accusing Notre Dame of saying that Obama's alleged "support for policies and programs that bring death to more than a million unborn children every year is no disqualification to being honored by a university dedicated to Our Lady who carried to term the Son of God." And the protests are not just a fringe phenomenon. Sixty-eight American bishops—one of whom suggested that Notre Dame change its name to Northwestern Indiana Humanist University—have voiced their displeasure.

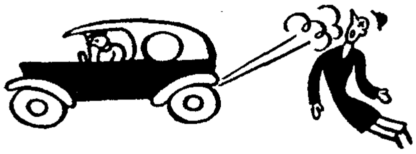
But Obama is not such an easy target. One of his first acts as President was to cancel the so-called "global gag rule," which denied funds to overseas family-planning organizations that also offer abortion services, or even information about abortion. But because the main focus of such organizations is contraception, cutting off their funding almost certainly resulted in more (and more dangerous) abortions, not fewer (and safer) ones. The President also reversed his predecessor's ban on funding for embryonic stem-cell research, but specified that the embryos must come from fertility clinics that would otherwise discard them. At his most recent press conference, he rejected the idea "that this is simply an issue about women's freedom and that there's no other considerations." And he noted that his domestic-policy staff "is working with groups both in the pro-choice camp and in the pro-life camp to see if we can arrive at some consensus" on ways to reduce the unwanted pregnancies that are abortion's invariable precondition.

In any case, the controversy about Obama's Notre Dame appearance is less about him than about divisions within the American Catholic community. Church teaching holds that abortion, even in cases of rape or incest, is an "intrinsic evil." Contraception is an "intrinsic evil," too (as is torture). But a Pew poll prompted by the Notre Dame flap found that more Catholics would keep abortion legal in all or most cases than would ban or restrict it, and a Gallup study found practically no difference between Catholics and non-Catholics on embryonic stem-cell research, which is "morally acceptable" to around sixty per cent of both groups. It is significant that sixty-eight bishops have protested Notre Dame's invitation, but just as significant that hundreds have not. The real division is between social conservatives, on the one hand, and social moderates and liberals, on the other, not between Catholics and non-Catholics. But that doesn't make it any less deep, and Obama's approach—practical, nonideological, "pro-choice" but hardly pro-abortion—is more likely than any of the alternatives to keep it relatively civil.

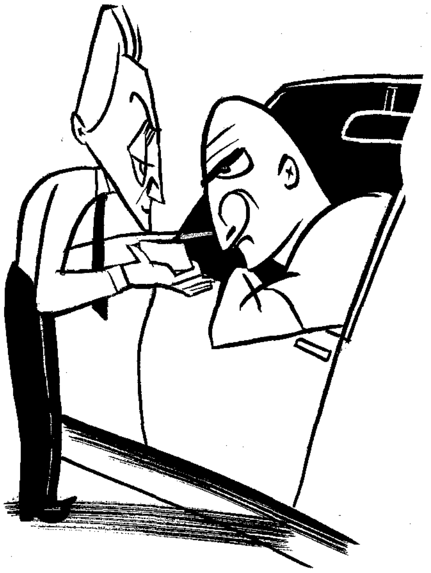
Meanwhile, from the midshipmen at Annapolis, not a peep. Mercifully.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF SAMARITANS
ENGINE TROUBLE



George Pakenham works for an international mortgage desk on Wall Street, but his business cards are printed with Section 4-08, Subsection P, of the New York City traffic code, as it pertains to engine idling. (Roughly speaking, it is prohibited for more than three minutes, and carries potential fines of several hundred dollars.) Pakenham is concerned about the quality of the air, and the quantity of oil, and he has distributed nearly two thousand cards over the past two and a half years to drivers who refuse to shut off their engines at curbside. He typically begins with a rap on the window and a preëmptive apology: "Sorry to bother you, my friend, but you might not know . . ." Only a handful of the cards have been crumpled up, tossed back out the window, or both, in his presence.



Pakenham, who is fifty-nine, does not own a car. (When riding shotgun, he sometimes reaches over and kills the ignition at stoplights.) His friends call him the Verdant Vigilante, and few documents depict the uneasy intersection of civic activism and ordinary city life as well as the Excel spreadsheet he maintains, recording his "encounters" on the street. Pakenham likes keeping statistics. He has, for instance, a seventy-eight-per-cent success rate in asking motorists to cease idling. His target demographic is eighty-nine per cent male and fifty-six per cent white. (He uses "amigo" instead of "friend" if he judges a driver to be Latino.) ConEd is the worst corporate offender. Only twenty-nine per cent of idlers are familiar with the law. He recognizes that his "failures" are in many ways more interesting—"I'll walk away and they'll rev their engine just to annoy me, just to show they're powerful jungle creatures," he said recently—and so he includes a comment with each entry, for entertainment or posterity:

November 30, 2007, black male, limo, age "50+": "He was peeing into a bottle and I disturbed him."

February 12, 2008, white female, truck, age "50+": "'I won't freeze for you.'"

June 23, 2008, white male, limo, age "50+": "'I'm not an amigo. I'm a comrade.'"

July 11, 2008, black female, bus (Access-A-Ride), age "25-35": "'Then don't breathe.'"

August 8, 2008, white male, sedan, age "35-50": "Guy was rolling a joint."

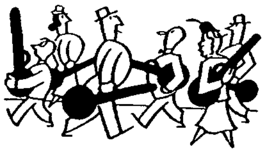
Pakenham is unusually shy and well mannered for a curmudgeon, and his accounts of unpleasantness make several references to "guff" and one mention of a "MAJOR ISSUE." Some of the most vivid rebuttals have come from what he calls "two-time losers," or repeat offenders. (September 3, 2008: "'Get away from me. Go move to China.'" September 16, 2008: "His buddy said, 'You are not human.'") The idler-in-chief appears to be Tommy, a white male who works for the city and has been caught by Pakenham four times. (March 13, 2008: "It's Tommy once again. Asleep at the wheel.") But—good news!—Tommy now drives a hybrid.

Ordinarily, Pakenham confines his rounds to the morning and evening commutes on the Upper West Side and in the financial district, making it all the more remarkable that, by his own calculations, were he authorized to write tickets he could have raised $158,620 in city revenues in 2007 alone—more than the N.Y.P.D. and the D.E.P. combined. The other day, Pakenham left his desk for an afternoon stroll in search of air polluters. He apologized before coughing several times, and then cautioned that he has "a little bit of a phobia" when it comes to staging encounters in front of his office, lest the town-car passengers have the authority to fire him. He wandered half a block before approaching his first victim: a Latino limo driver who seemed to choose not to speak any English. A goateed truck driver looked at Pakenham's card and said, "It hasn't been three minutes, but O.K.," and turned the key. A woman with New Jersey plates said, "Go green," not entirely in earnest. When in doubt, Pakenham approached a vehicle from the rear, stopping to cup his hand behind the tailpipe. He noted a noisy FreshDirect truck. "You think they're idling, but they're not," he said. "It's the overhead engine, I believe."

Four successes, one failure, no real guff. Pakenham retreated to his desk, where he displays a photograph of Mayor Bloomberg signing a couple of recent bills designed to reduce idling, and updated his spreadsheet. Pakenham is not sanguine about the legislation ("It's all fluff"), but he feels the tide of popular opinion turning. "Three years from now, it'll be like secondhand smoke," he said. "You'll be saying, 'Why are you idling, buddy? Where you been? Under a rock?'"

—*Ben McGrath*

FAT LADY SINGS DEPT.
THE WALL

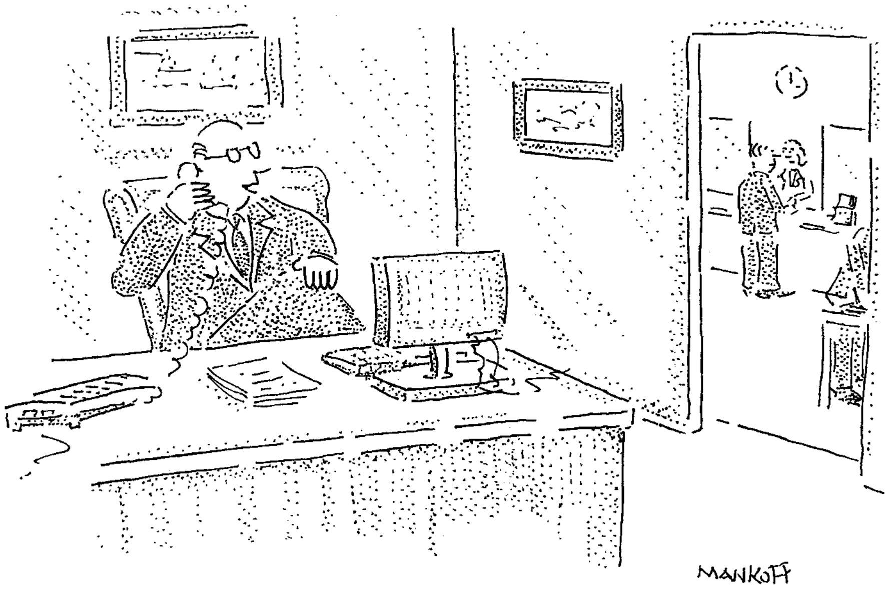


Manny's Music, one of the largest of the West Forty-eighth Street musical-instrument stores, is closing soon, and among the matters yet to be resolved between Manny's owner, Sam Ash Music, and Manny's founding family, the descendants of Manny Goldrich, is the fate of the hundreds of publicity photographs of musicians that line the store's walls. Many of them are inscribed with personal notes to Manny, who died in 1968, and to his son Henry, who is seventy-six and retired.

It was Holly Goldrich, Henry's daughter, who, together with a filmmaker named Sandi Bachom, had the idea for Manny's Virtual Wall, a social-networking site. Holly and Sandi are working with Kodak to scan the photos and to get camcorders into the hands of longtime Manny's customers, who include many of the world's best-known rock musicians. Their idea was that those musicians who couldn't make it into the store for interviews could film themselves talking about their memories. The images and the interviews will be posted on Manny's Virtual Wall.

One afternoon last week, three musicians gathered in the electric-guitar showroom at the back of the store to help build the Virtual Wall. John Sebastian, a founder of the Lovin' Spoonful, arrived first, and was soon joined by Tom Chapin and Leslie West, the guitar player from the Vagrants and, later, Mountain. Sebastian, who was wearing a fedora, and Chapin, who had on a blue work shirt, played some country blues, while West, in a black shirt with a samurai sword embroidered on the back, tried out guitar effects. All three have been coming to Manny's since they were teen-agers, fifty years ago.

Bachom asked Sebastian, who wrote "Do You Believe in Magic" on a Gibson J-45 that he bought from Henry, what made Manny's special. "Other stores, they

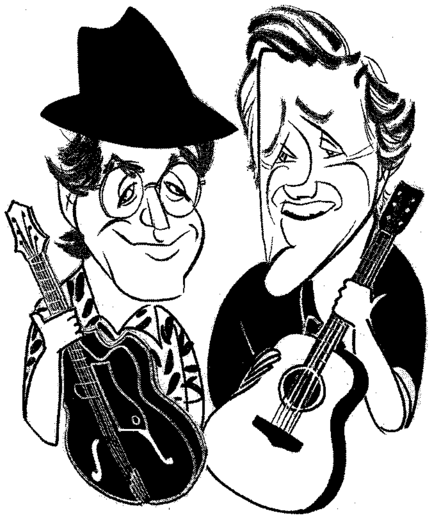


"And we will absolutely start lending again as soon as we finish building our debtors' prison."

wouldn't be as rude. It was more fun to call up Henry and then insult him, and then he'd insult you, than 'Hello, Guitar Center,' " Sebastian said, in a simpering voice.

Soon Henry turned up, and he sat at the center of the group. West moved in closer to him.

"Get out of my face," Goldrich said. "Seriously. You're bothering me." West retreated.



John Sebastian and Tom Chapin

Manny's is a vestige of a vital cultural industry that once flourished just north of Times Square—session musicians and band members used instruments purchased at Manny's to perform songs written in the Brill Building, on Forty-ninth Street, and in the recording studios and ballrooms around Fifty-second Street. Manny's, founded in 1935, provided not just the instruments but a place for players to hang out between gigs. Under Henry's management, with the rise of the electric guitar, the store grew larger. Jimi Hendrix bought many of his guitars there. Ringo Starr got the Ludwig drum set used in the Beatles' "Ed Sullivan Show" performances from Manny's. Generations of guitar-besotted teen-agers followed their heroes through the doors, where they were greeted with thinly veiled hostility by the sales staff. The store didn't encourage you to play the instruments unless you were famous, and you didn't get to keep the pick when you were finished. "You gonna buy it today?" the head salesman, Carl, would ask menacingly. But there was a bracing in-your-faceness about the experience which felt like real New York.

"Henry would never let you turn the knobs up above two," West complained.

"That was just you," Goldrich said. "I let *these* guys."

"These guys played acoustic!" West said. "Did you ever play an instrument?"

"I played cash register," Goldrich replied.

After busting each other's chops for an hour or so, the group walked to the front of the store to look at the pictures. Sebastian found himself in an eight-by-ten glossy of the Lovin' Spoonful. West examined a shot of Keith Moon thrusting his tongue into West's mouth. "Do I look fat?" he asked.

Goldrich was content to settle into his old spot, on a stool near the counter. "Every piece of popular music ever recorded was by people on these walls," he said. "Only one who never came in was Elvis. He wanted the stuff delivered to the hotel—he stayed at the Warwick, I think. The Beatles—the Beatles were always very courteous. Almost all the rock stars were. Don McLean, Tim Hardin, Soupy Sales. The Who. John Entwistle—now there was a gentleman. He invited my wife and me to his house—his castle, I should say—in England. It took us forty-five minutes to go through it!" On and on, until it was hard to tell where the Wall ended and Goldrich's memories began.

—*John Seabrook*

BRAVE NEW WORLD

GREEN COLLARS

Aspiring ironworkers in New York City must complete a three-year apprenticeship. They take classes two evenings a week and on occasional Saturdays, and they spend most of the third year practicing things like arc-welding single-V butt joints and slicing through inch-thick steel plates with oxyacetylene torches. One recent Wednesday evening, approximately two hundred of them arrived at the training center of Locals 40 and 361, on Thirty-sixth Street in Astoria, and encountered a scene of a type that has gladdened students' hearts since the time of Thomas Edison: a classroom furnished with a screen and a movie projector. It was Earth Day, and in its observance the apprentices were going to be shown "The Greening of Southie," a documentary about the construction of an environmentally friendly luxury apartment building in an old working-class neighborhood in Boston. Some of the third-year students were feeling nervous—the city's licensing exam for welders was a week away, leaving them little time for last-minute practice in the center's welding booths, which resemble oversized shower stalls—but few could have been as nervous as Ian Cheney, who had directed the film and agreed to introduce it. Making a movie about green construction is one thing; screening it for actual construction workers is another. Cheney wasn't wearing steel-toed boots, a do-rag, or a split cowhide welding jacket, and his arms and neck were neither bulging with muscles nor heavily tattooed, and he had to warn the ironworkers that they might see people in the film wearing Boston Red Sox insignia. "If that's shocking to you," he said, "just close your eyes."

In one of the movie's opening sequences, a foreman explains to a roomful of workers that, for environmental reasons, smoking will be prohibited, even during construction—and, as he says this, the workers look less like workers than like third-year acting apprentices who have mastered a variety of techniques for conveying bemused incredulity. As the project proceeds, however, many of them become converts, or semi-converts—"I believe that shit is organic," a roofer says as he spreads hot black glop. An ironworker named Bob Gottlich, who has so many earrings in his left ear that its rim looks like a riveting exercise, says that, before the project began, "I never heard about a green building," but that turning junked cars into steel beams makes obvious sense. A dreadlocked laborer named Wayne Phillips—"It never really come across my mind to give the environment a good deep study"—brings his teen-aged daughter to the building so that she can see the water-saving dual-flush toilets. Carrie Mowbray, a woman who works for the company that hauls construction waste from the site, says she once thought that trying to be green was "dorky," but that she has come around, and she has now had an image of a roll-out truck tattooed on her rear end—which she proves by pulling down the waistband of her jeans, earning appreciative applause from the apprentices.

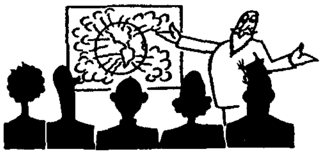
When the movie ended, Cheney asked for comments, and (he explained later) was pleasantly surprised. "I noticed there are a lot of imports," one apprentice said, referring to the fact that the project's architect, despite a supposed preference for local materials, had specified bamboo flooring from China, hardwood decking from Bolivia, and plumbing fixtures from Australia. Another apprentice said, "I didn't see any passive solar on that building." A third wondered whether there were any moisture-related issues involved in replacing fibreglass insulation with recycled cotton. A fourth asked about the comparative environmental impact of steel versus concrete, giving Cheney an opportunity to describe steel, which is easy to remelt and reuse, as "a quintessential green material." Several ironworkers hung around afterward. Joseph Glynn, a second-year apprentice—"I learned to weld in the Navy, and I joined the union through a program called Helmets to Hardhats"—followed up on the discussion of imports by describing the black exhaust smoke that is emitted by oceangoing vessels, most of which are powered by a form of petroleum called residual fuel oil.

Cheney had brought a pile of stickers printed with the title of his film and the slogan "Green and Proud," and he invited the ironworkers to affix them to their hard hats. Within ten minutes, all the stickers were gone. An instructor explained that ironworkers are enthusiastic collectors not only of stickers but of pins. Bryan Brady II, the director of training for Locals 40 and 361, said, "The future is going to be a lot different than it is now."

—*David Owen*

HALLS OF ACADEME

END-TIMES 101



It was a sunny spring day when Michael Taussig, a professor of anthropology at Columbia, wrapped up his graduate seminar on the apocalypse (official title: "Preëmptive Apocalyptic Thought: The Angel of History Reconsidered in Light of Climate Change, the War on Terror, and Financial Meltdown"). Meanwhile, the World Health Organization was warning of an imminent swine-flu pandemic, the gross domestic product shrivelled for the third quarter in a row, and Senator Arlen Specter became a Democrat.

Inside the seminar room, students were discussing Hurricane Katrina and African-American science fiction. Lance Thurner, a candidate for a master's degree in oral history, was about to show the class a low-budget 2008 film called "The Fullness of Time." In the movie, Gigi, a woman on a mission from another planet, lands in New Orleans two years after Katrina, with the Mardi Gras Indians and a New Orleans brass band as her spiritual guides. When the screening was over, Taussig, who is sixty-nine, declared it to be "one of the greatest pieces of ethnography I've ever seen in my entire life!" He said, "I can't believe how wonderfully unreal this reality is."

Taussig, who is the author of such texts as "My Cocaine Museum" and "What Color Is the Sacred?," is the foremost practitioner of a technique called "fictocriticism," which the *Times* has called "gonzo anthropology." Trained as a physician in Australia, Taussig discovered his calling in the jungles of Colombia, where he travelled in 1969, inspired by the struggles of Marxist guerrillas. (He also discovered there the hallucinogenic properties of *yagé*.) He is tall, with steel-gray hair, and he had on a jungle-print shirt and linen pants.

He decided to teach a class on the apocalypse, he said, because "now seemed like a good time." He had to turn away more than a dozen students. Halfway through the semester, he abolished final papers, replacing them with "apo diaries," in which students were to note omens of the apocalypse around them, using the scrapbooks of William S. Burroughs as a model. One student's included an image of the wrestler Jake (The Snake) Roberts, snake in hand, juxtaposed with a glaring Jesus, also snake in hand, who is saying, "Don't fuck with the Apocalypse."

Topics during the semester have included Glenn Beck, an R.V. that can go two thousand miles without stopping for gas, Walter Benjamin, 9/11, Las Vegas, and apocalyptic Yiddish poetry, which reminded Taussig of a song by the Fugs called "Septuagenarian in Love" ("Every time we have some sex / it almost breaks my balls"). Some students confessed that after a while the material had started scaring them. One developed insomnia.

For the final session, the theme was the cyclical interrelationship of trauma and the apocalypse, and Thurner, after screening the movie, tried to create a theoretical framework for discussion by drawing a series of diagrams, all arrows and blobs, on the blackboard. "So here," he said, drawing a swooping arc, "we're coming around to catastrophe. But if we're preëmptively thinking about it, it's making it happen faster, right?" He stepped back and looked at the diagrams, puzzled.

Taussig was more interested in Thurner himself, who, pre-academia, was involved in radical anti-globalization and environmental activism. Thurner said that a few people he knew had ended up in prison for doing "some things."

"What kind of things?" Taussig asked.

"Things were burned down," Thurner mumbled sheepishly.

"So, according to your third drawing, the only thing you could return to is the moment after the apocalypse," a young woman said, when discussion moved back to the diagrams. "You're also assuming that any identity or subjectivity you create is grounded inherently in trauma."

"Why bring identity into it?" Taussig said. "What's at stake here is being itself!"

The discussion moved on to Freud, Adorno, diarrhea-related fatalities, the banality of long-term catastrophe versus the excitement of instant apocalypse, Surrealism, a friend who started doing yoga after her father died, drowning polar bears, Jon Stewart, and, finally, swine flu and whether it is a sign of a real or a "mediated" apocalypse.

Taussig interrupted. "If you were living in Mexico City, how on top of your game would you really be?" he asked. "How well could you cope with catastrophe unfolding around you? That's really where I'd like to leave this class."

"Oh!" he said, as students solemnly loaded their backpacks. "Don't forget! Potluck tomorrow! Eight o'clock!"

—*Julia Ioffe*

DEPT. OF SCIENCE

DON'T!

The secret of self-control.

BY JONAH LEHRER

In the late nineteen-sixties, Carolyn Weisz, a four-year-old with long brown hair, was invited into a "game room" at the Bing Nursery School, on the campus of Stanford University. The room was little more than a large closet, containing a desk and a chair. Carolyn was asked to sit down in the chair and pick a treat from a tray of marshmallows, cookies, and pretzel sticks. Carolyn chose the marshmallow. Although she's now forty-four, Carolyn still has a weakness for those air-puffed balls of corn syrup and gelatine. "I know I shouldn't like them," she says. "But they're just so delicious!" A researcher then made Carolyn an offer: she could either eat one marshmallow right away or, if she was willing to wait while he stepped out for a few minutes, she could have two marshmallows when he returned. He said that if she rang a bell on the desk while he was away he would come running back, and she could eat one marshmallow but would forfeit the second. Then he left the room.

Although Carolyn has no direct memory of the experiment, and the scientists would not release any information about the subjects, she strongly suspects that she was able to delay gratification. "I've always been really good at waiting," Carolyn told me. "If you give me a challenge or a task, then I'm going to find a way to do it, even if it means not eating my favorite food." Her mother, Karen Sortino, is still more certain: "Even as a young kid, Carolyn was very patient. I'm sure she would have waited." But her brother Craig, who also took part in the experiment, displayed less fortitude. Craig, a year older than Carolyn, still remembers the torment of trying to wait. "At a certain point, it must have occurred to me that I was all by myself," he recalls. "And so I just started taking all the candy." According to Craig, he was also tested with little plastic toys—he could have a second one if he held out—and he broke into the desk, where he figured there would be additional toys. "I took everything I could," he says. "I cleaned them out. After that, I noticed the teachers encouraged me to not go into the experiment room anymore."

Footage of these experiments, which were conducted over several years, is poignant, as the kids struggle to delay gratification for just a little bit longer. Some cover their eyes with their hands or turn around so that they can't see the tray. Others start kicking the desk, or tug on their pigtails, or stroke the marshmallow as if it were a tiny stuffed animal. One child, a boy with neatly parted hair, looks carefully around the room to make sure that nobody can see him. Then he picks up an Oreo, delicately twists it apart, and licks off the white cream filling before returning the cookie to the tray, a satisfied look on his face.

Most of the children were like Craig. They struggled to resist the treat and held out for an average of less than three minutes. "A few kids ate the marshmallow right away," Walter Mischel, the Stanford professor of psychology in charge of the experiment, remembers. "They didn't even bother ringing the bell. Other kids would stare directly at the marshmallow and then ring the bell thirty seconds later." About thirty per cent of the children, however, were like Carolyn. They successfully delayed gratification until the researcher returned, some fifteen minutes later. These kids wrestled with temptation but found a way to resist.

The initial goal of the experiment was to identify the mental processes that allowed some people to delay gratification while others simply surrendered. After publishing a few papers on the Bing studies in the early seventies, Mischel moved on to other areas of personality research. "There are only so many things you can do with kids trying not to eat marshmallows."

But occasionally Mischel would ask his three daughters, all of whom attended the Bing, about their friends from

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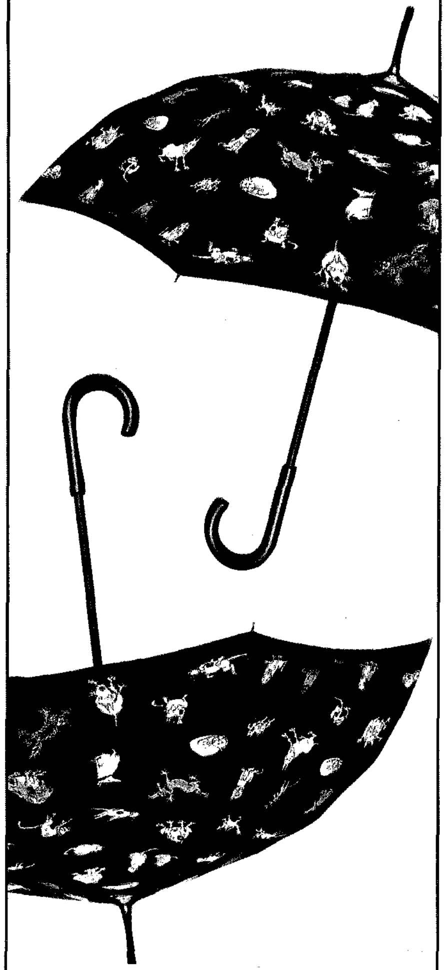

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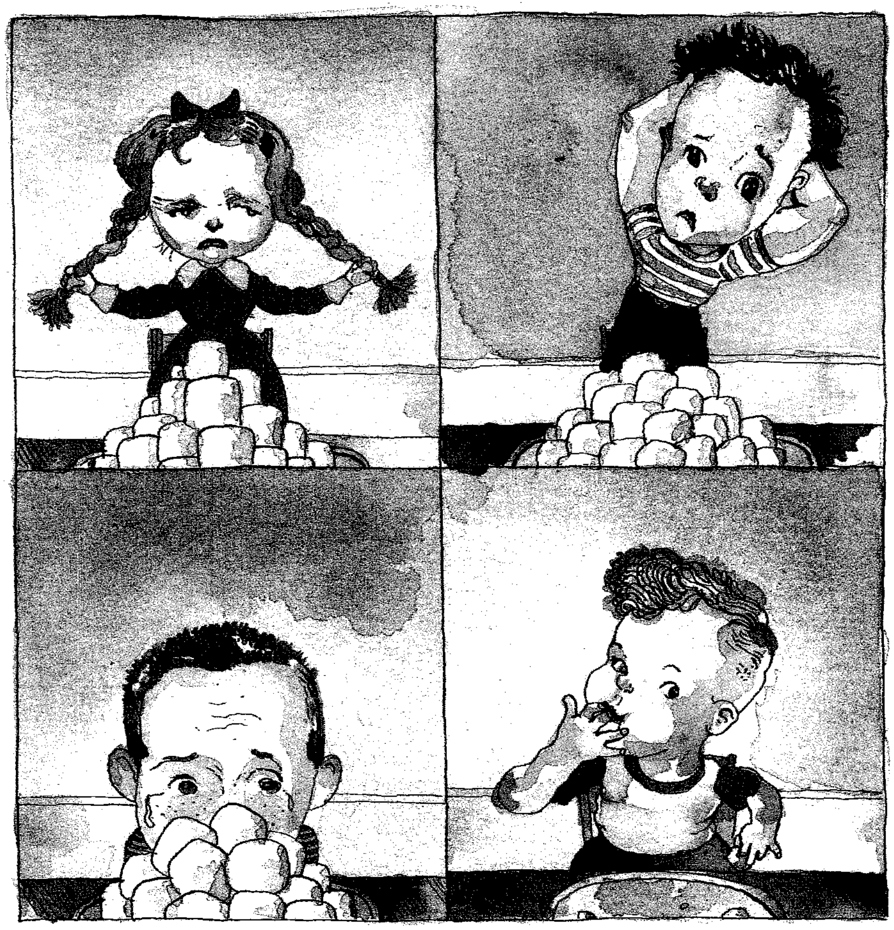
nursery school. "It was really just idle dinnertime conversation," he says. "I'd ask them, 'How's Jane? How's Eric? How are they doing in school?'" Mischel began to notice a link between the children's academic performance as teen-agers and their ability to wait for the second marshmallow. He asked his daughters to assess their friends academically on a scale of zero to five. Comparing these ratings with the original data set, he saw a correlation. "That's when I realized I had to do this seriously," he says. Starting in 1981, Mischel sent out a questionnaire to all the reachable parents, teachers, and academic advisers of the six hundred and fifty-three subjects who had participated in the marshmallow task, who were by then in high school. He asked about every trait he could think of, from their capacity to plan and think ahead to their ability to "cope well with problems" and get along with their peers. He also requested their S.A.T. scores.

Once Mischel began analyzing the results, he noticed that low delayers, the children who rang the bell quickly, seemed more likely to have behavioral problems, both in school and at home. They got lower S.A.T. scores. They struggled in stressful situations, often had trouble paying attention, and found it difficult to maintain friendships. The child who could wait fifteen minutes had an S.A.T. score that was, on average, two hundred and ten points higher than that of the kid who could wait only thirty seconds.

Carolyn Weisz is a textbook example of a high delayer. She attended Stanford as an undergraduate, and got her Ph.D. in social psychology at Princeton. She's now an associate psychology professor at the University of Puget Sound. Craig, meanwhile, moved to Los Angeles and has spent his career doing "all kinds of things" in the entertainment industry, mostly in production. He's currently helping to write and produce a film. "Sure, I wish I had been a more patient person," Craig says. "Looking back, there are definitely moments when it would have helped me make better career choices and stuff."



Children who are able to pass the marshmallow test enjoy greater success as adults.

BARRY BLITT

Mischel and his colleagues continued to track the subjects into their late thirties—Ozlem Ayduk, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley, found that low-delaying adults have a significantly higher body-mass index and are more likely to have had problems with drugs—but it was frustrating to have to rely on self-reports. "There's often a gap between what people are willing to tell you and how they behave in the real world," he explains. And so, last year, Mischel, who is now a professor at Columbia, and a team of collaborators began asking the original Bing subjects to travel to Stanford for a few days of experiments in an fMRI machine. Carolyn says she will be participating in the scanning experiments later this summer; Craig completed a survey several years ago, but has yet to be invited to Palo Alto. The scientists are hoping to identify the particular brain regions that allow some people to delay gratification and control their temper. They're also conducting a variety of genetic tests, as they search for the hereditary characteristics that influence the ability to wait for a second marshmallow.

If Mischel and his team succeed, they will have outlined the neural circuitry of self-control. For decades, psychologists have focussed on raw intelligence as the most important variable when it comes to predicting success in life. Mischel argues that intelligence is largely at the mercy of self-control: even the smartest kids still need to do their homework. "What we're really measuring with the marshmallows isn't will power or self-control," Mischel says. "It's much more important than that. This task forces kids to find a way to make the situation work for them. They want the second marshmallow, but how can they get it? We can't control the world, but we can control how we think about it."

Walter Mischel is a slight, elegant man with a shaved head and a face of deep creases. He talks with a Brooklyn bluster and he tends to act out his sentences, so that when he describes the marshmallow task he takes on the body language of an impatient four-year-old. "If you want to know why some kids can wait and others can't, then you've got to think like they think," Mischel says.

Mischel was born in Vienna, in 1930. His father was a modestly successful businessman with a fondness for café society and Esperanto, while his mother spent many of her days lying on the couch with an ice pack on her forehead, trying to soothe her frail nerves. The family considered itself fully assimilated, but after the Nazi annexation of Austria, in 1938, Mischel remembers being taunted in school by the Hitler Youth and watching as his father, hobbled by childhood polio, was forced to limp through the streets in his pajamas. A few weeks after the takeover, while the family was burning evidence of their Jewish ancestry in the fireplace, Walter found a long-forgotten certificate of U.S. citizenship issued to his maternal grandfather decades earlier, thus saving his family.

The family settled in Brooklyn, where Mischel's parents opened up a five-and-dime. Mischel attended New York University, studying poetry under Delmore Schwartz and Allen Tate, and taking studio-art classes with Philip Guston. He also became fascinated by psychoanalysis and new measures of personality, such as the Rorschach test. "At the time, it seemed like a mental X-ray machine," he says. "You could solve a person by showing them a picture." Although he was pressured to join his uncle's umbrella business, he ended up pursuing a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Ohio State.

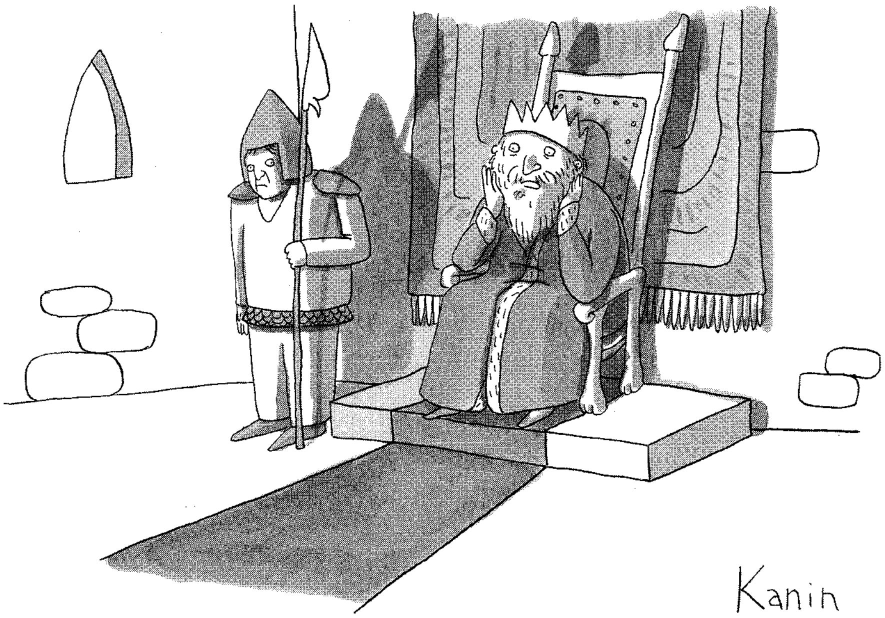
But Mischel noticed that academic theories had limited application, and he was struck by the futility of most personality science. He still flinches at the naïveté of graduate students who based their diagnoses on a battery of meaningless tests. In 1955, Mischel was offered an opportunity to study the "spirit possession" ceremonies of the Orisha faith in Trinidad, and he leapt at the chance. Although his research was supposed to involve the use of Rorschach tests to explore the connections between the unconscious and the behavior of people when possessed, Mischel soon grew interested in a different project. He lived in a part of the island that was evenly split between people of East Indian and of African descent; he noticed that each group defined the other in broad stereotypes. "The East Indians would describe the Africans as impulsive hedonists, who were always living for the moment and never thought about the future," he says. "The Africans, meanwhile, would say that the East Indians didn't know how to live and would stuff money in their mattress and never enjoy themselves."

Mischel took young children from both ethnic groups and offered them a simple choice: they could have a miniature chocolate bar right away or, if they waited a few days, they could get a much bigger chocolate bar. Mischel's results failed to justify the stereotypes—other variables, such as whether or not the children lived with their father, turned out to be much more important—but they did get him interested in the question of delayed gratification. Why did some children wait and not others? What made waiting possible? Unlike the broad traits supposedly assessed by personality tests, self-control struck Mischel as potentially measurable.

In 1958, Mischel became an assistant professor in the Department of Social Relations at Harvard. One of his first tasks was to develop a survey course on "personality assessment," but Mischel quickly concluded that, while prevailing theories held personality traits to be broadly consistent, the available data didn't back up this assumption. Personality, at least as it was then conceived, couldn't be reliably assessed at all. A few years later, he was hired as a consultant on a personality assessment initiated by the Peace Corps. Early Peace Corps volunteers had sparked several embarrassing international incidents—one mailed a postcard on which she expressed disgust at the sanitary habits of her host country—so the Kennedy Administration wanted a screening process to eliminate people unsuited for foreign assignments. Volunteers were tested for standard personality traits, and Mischel compared the results with ratings of how well the volunteers performed in the field. He found no correlation; the time-consuming tests predicted nothing. At this point, Mischel realized that the problem wasn't the tests—it was their premise. Psychologists had spent decades searching for traits that exist independently of circumstance, but what if personality can't be separated from context? "It went against the way we'd been thinking about personality since the four humors and the ancient Greeks," he says.

While Mischel was beginning to dismantle the methods of his field, the Harvard psychology department was in tumult. In 1960, the personality psychologist Timothy Leary helped start the Harvard Psilocybin Project, which consisted mostly of self-experimentation. Mischel remembers graduate students' desks giving way to mattresses, and large packages from Ciba chemicals, in Switzerland, arriving in the mail. Mischel had nothing against hippies, but he wanted modern psychology to be rigorous and empirical. And so, in 1962, Walter Mischel moved to Palo Alto and went to work at Stanford.

There is something deeply contradictory about Walter Mischel—a psychologist who spent decades critiquing the validity of personality tests—inventing the marshmallow task, a simple test with impressive predictive power. Mi-



"I want to be feared as a tyrant, loved as a father, and revered as a god, but I also want them to think I'm funny."

schel, however, insists there is no contradiction. "I've always believed there are consistencies in a person that can be looked at," he says. "We just have to look in the right way." One of Mischel's classic studies documented the aggressive behavior of children in a variety of situations at a summer camp in New Hampshire. Most psychologists assumed that aggression was a stable trait, but Mischel found that children's responses depended on the details of the interaction. The same child might consistently lash out when teased by a peer, but readily submit to adult punishment. Another might react badly to a warning from a counsellor, but play well with his bunkmates. Aggression was best assessed in terms of what Mischel called "if-then patterns." If a certain child was teased by a peer, then he would be aggressive.

One of Mischel's favorite metaphors for this model of personality, known as interactionism, concerns a car making a screeching noise. How does a mechanic solve the problem? He begins by trying to identify the specific conditions that trigger the noise. Is there a screech when the car is accelerating, or when it's shifting gears, or turning at slow speeds? Unless the mechanic can give the screech a context, he'll never find the broken part. Mischel wanted psychologists to think like mechanics, and look at people's responses under particular conditions. The challenge was devising a test that accurately simulated something relevant to the behavior being predicted. The search for a meaningful test of personality led Mischel to revisit, in 1968, the protocol he'd used on young children in Trinidad nearly a decade earlier. The experiment seemed especially relevant now that he had three young daughters of his own. "Young kids are pure id," Mischel says. "They start off unable to wait for anything—whatever they want they need. But then, as I watched my own kids, I marvelled at how they gradually learned how to delay and how that made so many other things possible."

A few years earlier, in 1966, the Stanford psychology department had established the Bing Nursery School. The classrooms were designed as working laboratories, with large one-way mirrors that allowed researchers to observe the children. In February, Jennifer Winters, the assistant director of the school, showed me around the building. While the Bing is still an active center of research—the children quickly learn to ignore the students scribbling in notebooks—Winters isn't sure that Mischel's marshmallow task could be replicated today. "We recently tried to do a version of it, and the kids were very excited about having food in the game room," she says. "There are so many allergies and peculiar diets today that we don't do many things with food."

Mischel perfected his protocol by testing his daughters at the kitchen table. "When you're investigating will power in a four-year-old, little things make a big difference," he says. "How big should the marshmallows be? What kind of cookies work best?" After several months of patient tinkering, Mischel came up with an experimental design that closely simulated the difficulty of delayed gratification. In the spring of 1968, he conducted the first trials of his experiment at the Bing. "I knew we'd designed it well when a few kids wanted to quit as soon as we explained the conditions to them," he says. "They knew this was going to be very difficult."

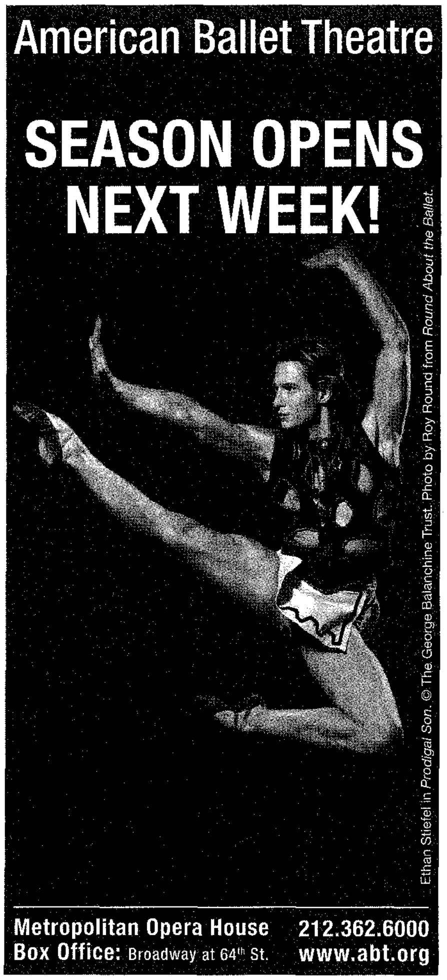
At the time, psychologists assumed that children's ability to wait depended on how badly they wanted the marshmallow. But it soon became obvious that every child craved the extra treat. What, then, determined self-control? Mischel's conclusion, based on hundreds of hours of observation, was that the crucial skill was the "strategic allocation of attention." Instead of getting obsessed with the marshmallow—the "hot stimulus"—the patient children distracted themselves by covering their eyes, pretending to play hide-and-seek underneath the desk, or singing songs from "Sesame Street." Their desire wasn't defeated—it was merely forgotten. "If you're thinking about the marshmallow and how delicious it is, then you're going to eat it," Mischel says. "The key is to avoid thinking about it in the first place."

In adults, this skill is often referred to as metacognition, or thinking about thinking, and it's what allows people to outsmart their shortcomings. (When Odysseus had himself tied to the ship's mast, he was using some of the skills of metacognition: knowing he wouldn't be able to resist the Sirens' song, he made it impossible to give in.) Mischel's large data set from various studies allowed him to see that children with a more accurate understanding of the workings of self-control were better able to delay gratification. "What's interesting about four-year-olds is that they're just figuring out the rules of thinking," Mischel says. "The kids who couldn't delay would often have the rules backwards. They would think that the best way to resist the marshmallow is to stare right at it, to keep a close eye on the goal. But that's a terrible idea. If you do that, you're going to ring the bell before I leave the room."

According to Mischel, this view of will power also helps explain why the marshmallow task is such a powerfully predictive test. "If you can deal with hot emotions, then you can study for the S.A.T. instead of watching television," Mischel says. "And you can save more money for retirement. It's not just about marshmallows."

Subsequent work by Mischel and his colleagues found that these differences were observable in subjects as young as nineteen months. Looking at how toddlers responded when briefly separated from their mothers, they found that some immediately burst into tears, or clung to the door, but others were able to overcome their anxiety by distracting themselves, often by playing with toys. When the scientists set the same children the marshmallow task at the age of five, they found that the kids who had cried also struggled to resist the tempting treat.

The early appearance of the ability to delay suggests that it has a genetic origin, an example of personality at its most predetermined. Mischel resists such an easy conclusion. "In general, trying to separate nature and nurture makes about as much sense as trying to separate personality and situation," he says. "The two influences are completely interrelated." For instance, when Mischel gave delay-of-gratification tasks to children from low-income families in the Bronx, he noticed that their ability to delay was below average, at least compared with that of children in Palo Alto. "When you grow up poor, you might not practice delay as much," he says. "And if you don't practice then you'll never figure out how to distract yourself. You won't develop the best delay strategies, and those strategies won't become second nature." In other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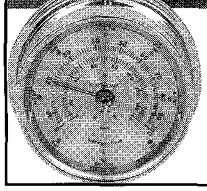
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words, people learn how to use their mind just as they learn how to use a computer: through trial and error.

But Mischel has found a shortcut. When he and his colleagues taught children a simple set of mental tricks—such as pretending that the candy is only a picture, surrounded by an imaginary frame—he dramatically improved their self-control. The kids who hadn't been able to wait sixty seconds could now wait fifteen minutes. "All I've done is given them some tips from their mental user manual," Mischel says. "Once you realize that will power is just a matter of learning how to control your attention and thoughts, you can really begin to increase it."

Marc Berman, a lanky graduate student with an easy grin, speaks about his research with the infectious enthusiasm of a freshman taking his first philosophy class. Berman works in the lab of John Jonides, a psychologist and neuroscientist at the University of Michigan, who is in charge of the brain-scanning experiments on the original Bing subjects. He knows that testing forty-year-olds for self-control isn't a straightforward proposition. "We can't give these people marshmallows," Berman says. "They know they're part of a long-term study that looks at delay of gratification, so if you give them an obvious delay task they'll do their best to resist. You'll get a bunch of people who refuse to touch their marshmallow."

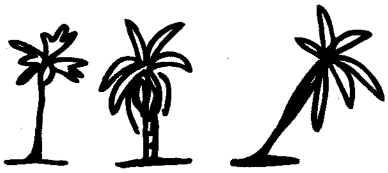
This meant that Jonides and his team had to find a way to measure will power indirectly. Operating on the premise that the ability to delay eating the marshmallow had depended on a child's ability to banish thoughts of it, they decided on a series of tasks that measure the ability of subjects to control the contents of working memory—the relatively limited amount of information we're able to consciously consider at any given moment. According to Jonides, this is how self-control "cashes out" in the real world: as an ability to direct the spotlight of attention so that our decisions aren't determined by the wrong thoughts.

Last summer, the scientists chose fifty-five subjects, equally split between high delayers and low delayers, and sent each one a laptop computer loaded with working-memory experiments. Two of the experiments were of particular interest. The first is a straightforward exercise known as the "suppression task." Subjects are given four random words, two printed in blue and two in red. After reading the words, they're told to forget the blue words and remember the red words. Then the scientists provide a stream of "probe words" and ask the subjects whether the probes are the words they were asked to remember. Though the task doesn't seem to involve delayed gratification, it tests the same basic mechanism. Interestingly, the scientists found that high delayers were significantly better at the suppression task: they were less likely to think that a word they'd been asked to forget was something they should remember.

In the second, known as the Go/No Go task, subjects are flashed a set of faces with various expressions. At first, they are told to press the space bar whenever they see a smile. This takes little effort, since smiling faces automatically trigger what's known as "approach behavior." After a few minutes, however, subjects are told to press the space bar when they see frowning faces. They are now being forced to act against an impulse. Results show that high delayers are more successful at not pressing the button in response to a smiling face.

When I first started talking to the scientists about these tasks last summer, they were clearly worried that they wouldn't find any behavioral differences between high and low delayers. It wasn't until early January that they had enough data to begin their analysis (not surprisingly, it took much longer to get the laptops back from the low delayers), but it soon became obvious that there were provocative differences between the two groups. A graph of the data shows that as the delay time of the four-year-olds decreases, the number of mistakes made by the adults sharply rises.

The big remaining question for the scientists is whether these behavioral differences are detectable in an fMRI machine. Although the scanning has just begun—Jonides and his team are



DELPHINIUMS IN A WINDOW BOX

Every sunrise, even strangers' eyes.
Not necessarily swans, even crows,
even the evening fusillade of bats.
That place where the creek goes underground,
how many weeks before I see you again?
Stacks of books, every page, characters'
rages and poets' strange contraptions
of syntax and song, every song
even when there isn't one.
Every thistle, splinter, butterfly
over the drainage ditches. Every stray.
Did you see the meteor shower?
Did it feel like something swallowed?
Every question, conversation
even with almost nothing, cricket, cloud,
because of you I'm talking to crickets, clouds,
confiding in a cat. Everyone says,
Come to your senses, and I do, of you.
Every touch electric, every taste you,
every smell, even burning sugar, every
cry and laugh. Toothpicked samples
at the farmers' market, every melon,
plum, I come undone, undone.

—*Dean Young*

still working out the kinks—the scientists sound confident. "These tasks have been studied so many times that we pretty much know where to look and what we're going to find," Jonides says. He rattles off a short list of relevant brain regions, which his lab has already identified as being responsible for working-memory exercises. For the most part, the regions are in the frontal cortex—the overhang of brain behind the eyes—and include the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the anterior prefrontal cortex, the anterior cingulate, and the right and left inferior frontal gyri. While these cortical folds have long been associated with self-control, they're also essential for working memory and directed attention. According to the scientists, that's not an accident. "These are powerful instincts telling us to reach for the marshmallow or press the space bar," Jonides says. "The only way to defeat them is to avoid them, and that means paying attention to something else. We call that will power, but it's got nothing to do with the will."

The behavioral and genetic aspects of the project are overseen by Yuichi Shoda, a professor of psychology at the University of Washington, who was one of Mischel's graduate students. He's been following these "marshmallow subjects" for more than thirty years: he knows everything about them from their academic records and their social graces to their ability to deal with frustration and stress. The prognosis for the genetic research remains uncertain. Although many studies have searched for the underpinnings of personality since the completion of the Human Genome Project, in 2003, many of the relevant genes remain in question. "We're incredibly complicated creatures," Shoda says. "Even the simplest aspects of personality are driven by dozens and dozens of different genes." The scientists have decided to focus on genes in the dopamine pathways, since those neurotransmitters are believed to regulate both motivation and attention. However, even if minor coding differences influence delay ability—and that's a likely possibility—Shoda doesn't expect to discover these differences: the sample size is simply too small.

In recent years, researchers have begun making house visits to many of the original subjects, including Carolyn Weisz, as they try to better understand the familial contexts that shape self-control. "They turned my kitchen into a lab," Carolyn told me. "They set up a little tent where they tested my oldest daughter on the delay task with some cookies. I remember thinking, I really hope she can wait."

While Mischel closely follows the steady accumulation of data from the laptops and the brain scans, he's most excited by what comes next. "I'm not interested in looking at the brain just so we can use a fancy machine," he says. "The real question is what can we do with this fMRI data that we couldn't do before?" Mischel is applying for an N.I.H. grant to investigate various mental illnesses, like obsessive-compulsive disorder and attention-deficit disorder, in terms of the ability to control and direct attention. Mischel and his team hope to identify crucial neural circuits that cut across a wide variety of ailments. If there is such a circuit, then the same cognitive tricks that increase delay time in a four-year-old might help adults deal with their symptoms. Mischel is particularly excited by the example of the substantial subset of people who failed the marshmallow task as four-year-olds but ended up becoming high-delaying adults. "This is the group I'm most interested in," he says. "They have substantially improved their lives."

Mischel is also preparing a large-scale study involving hundreds of schoolchildren in Philadelphia, Seattle, and New York City to see if self-control skills can be taught. Although he previously showed that children did much better on the marshmallow task after being taught a few simple "mental transformations," such as pretending the marshmallow was a cloud, it remains unclear if these new skills persist over the long term. In other words, do the tricks work only during the experiment or do the children learn to apply them at home, when deciding between homework and television?

Angela Lee Duckworth, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, is leading the program. She first grew interested in the subject after working as a high-school math teacher. "For the most part, it was an incredibly frustrating experience," she says. "I gradually became convinced that trying to teach a teen-ager algebra when they don't have self-control is a pretty futile exercise." And so, at the age of thirty-two, Duckworth decided to become a psychologist. One of her main research projects looked at the relationship between self-control and grade-point average. She found that the ability to delay gratification—eighth graders were given a choice between a dollar right away or two dollars the following week—was a far better predictor of academic performance than I.Q. She said that her study shows that "intelligence is really important, but it's still not as important as self-control."

Last year, Duckworth and Mischel were approached by David Levin, the co-founder of KIPP, an organization of sixty-six public charter schools across the country. KIPP schools are known for their long workday—students are in class from 7:25 A.M. to 5 P.M.—and for dramatic improvement of inner-city students' test scores. (More than eighty per cent of eighth graders at the KIPP academy in the South Bronx scored at or above grade level in reading and math, which was nearly twice the New York City average.) "The core feature of the KIPP approach is that character matters for success," Levin says. "Educators like to talk about character skills when kids are in kindergarten—we send young kids home with a report card about 'working well with others' or 'not talking out of turn.' But then, just when these skills start to matter, we stop trying to improve them. We just throw up our hands and complain."

Self-control is one of the fundamental "character strengths" emphasized by KIPP—the KIPP academy in Philadelphia, for instance, gives its students a shirt emblazoned with the slogan "Don't Eat the Marshmallow." Levin, however, remained unsure about how well the program was working—"We know how to teach math skills, but it's harder to measure character strengths," he says—so he contacted Duckworth and Mischel, promising them unfettered access to KIPP students. Levin also helped bring together additional schools willing to take part in the experiment, including Riverdale Country School, a private school in the Bronx; the Evergreen School for gifted children, in Shoreline, Washington; and the Mastery Charter Schools, in Philadelphia.

For the past few months, the researchers have been conducting pilot studies in the classroom as they try to figure out the most effective way to introduce complex psychological concepts to young children. Because the study will focus on students between the ages of four and eight, the classroom lessons will rely heavily on peer modelling, such as showing kindergartners a video of a child successfully distracting herself during the marshmallow task. The scientists have some encouraging preliminary results—after just a few sessions, students show significant improvements in the ability to deal with hot emotional states—but they are cautious about predicting the outcome of the long-term study. "When you do these large-scale educational studies, there are ninety-nine uninteresting reasons the study could fail," Duckworth says. "Maybe a teacher doesn't show the video, or maybe there's a field trip on the day of the testing. This is what keeps me up at night."

Mischel's main worry is that, even if his lesson plan proves to be effective, it might still be overwhelmed by variables the scientists can't control, such as the home environment. He knows that it's not enough just to teach kids mental tricks—the real challenge is turning those tricks into habits, and that requires years of diligent practice. "This is where your parents are important," Mischel says. "Have they established rituals that force you to delay on a daily basis? Do they encourage you to wait? And do they make waiting worthwhile?" According to Mischel, even the most mundane routines of childhood—such as not snacking before dinner, or saving up your allowance, or holding out until Christmas morning—are really sly exercises in cognitive training: we're teaching ourselves how to think so that we can outsmart our desires. But Mischel isn't satisfied with such an informal approach. "We should give marshmallows to every kindergartner," he says. "We should say, 'You see this marshmallow? You don't have to eat it. You can wait. Here's how.'" ♦

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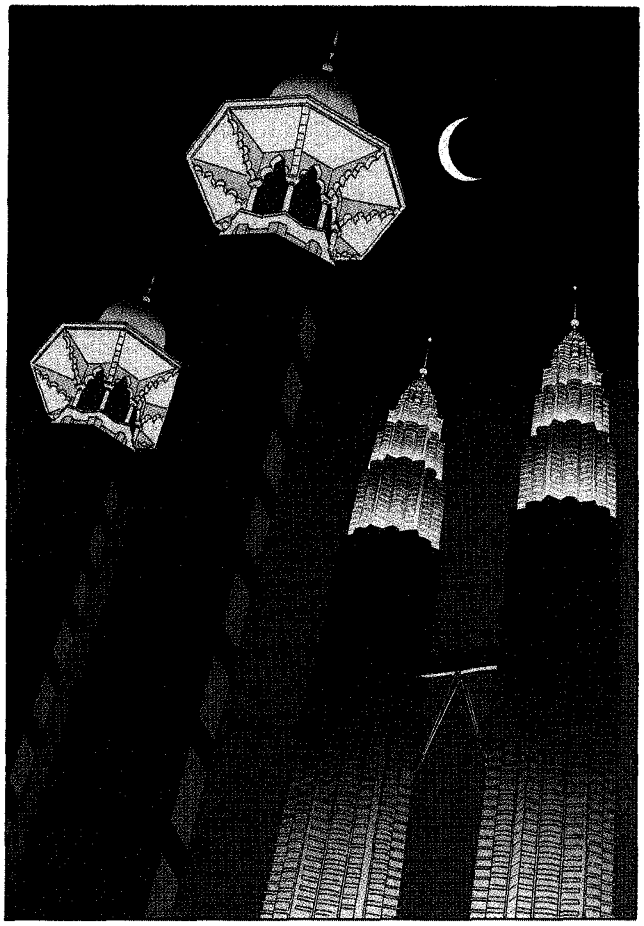
LETTER FROM MALAYSIA

EASTERN PROMISES

A once imprisoned politician may be his country's best chance for reform.

BY IAN BURUMA

Anwar Ibrahim's voice was barely audible above the background din of chattering guests and a cocktail-bar pianist at the Hilton Hotel in Kuala Lumpur. Anwar—who had rebounded from six years in prison on corruption and sodomy charges to become the best hope for a more democratic, less corrupt Malaysia—speaks softly. He is still under constant surveillance, he said. Sensitive political business has to be handled in other capitals—Jakarta, Bangkok, or Hong Kong. Security is a constant worry. Intelligence sources from three countries have warned him to be careful. "I'm taking a big risk just walking into this hotel to see you, but what can I do?" he murmured. "It's all too exhausting. But, you know, sometimes you just have to take risks."



Can Islamists and liberals unite against a corrupt status quo?

GUY BILLOUT

This was the same Anwar Ibrahim, one struggled to remember, who was once at the heart of the Malaysian establishment: the Minister of Culture in 1983, the Minister of Education in 1986, the Minister of Finance in 1991, a Deputy Prime Minister in 1993. He was poised to succeed Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad. And then he got overconfident. Starting in the summer of 1997, when the Malaysian currency and stock market lost more than half of their value in the Asian financial meltdown, Anwar did something that Mahathir found unforgivable. (Last names among the Malay are generally patronymics.) Even as the Prime Minister was imposing capital controls and blaming "rogue speculators," such as George Soros, for the crisis, Anwar launched an attack on "nepotism" and "cronyism" in his own party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which had been in power since independence. The "cronies" included members of Mahathir's family. While Mahathir tried to bail out banks and corporations run by his allies, Anwar talked about transparency and accepting some of the International Monetary Fund's recommendations for liberalizing the economy.

Mahathir does not like to be contradicted. In 1998, Anwar was removed from the cabinet and from UMNO. He was charged with corruption, and with sodomizing his speechwriter and his wife's chauffeur, and convicted. Under Malaysian law, "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" carries a sentence of up to twenty years. Anwar denied everything and took to the road, addressing crowds all over the country. When he was barred from speaking in halls, he spoke in mosques or parking lots, standing on top of trucks or cars. "The government is trying to keep the people away from me," he declared. "I am not afraid. No matter what happens, whether in prison . . . I will still strive, I will still fight, I will not step down." While awaiting trial, Anwar was badly beaten by the chief of police, and he says that attempts were made to poison him.

After his arrest, Anwar says, Mahathir gave a slide show for his cabinet colleagues, to justify the purge of his former heir apparent. There were photographs of current and former U.S. officials—Robert Rubin, William Cohen, and Paul Wolfowitz—along with the World Bank president, James Wolfensohn. "These are the people behind Anwar," Mahathir explained. (Mahathir denies showing any pictures, but allows, "I informed the cabinet about Anwar's associates.") Nobody was likely to miss the implication; Mahathir has clearly stated his conviction that "Jews rule this world by proxy." At the Hilton, Anwar, who started his career as the president of the Malaysian Muslim Students Union, and is still a devout Muslim, shrugged. "They say I'm a Jewish agent, because of my friendship with Paul," he said. "They also accuse me of being a lackey of the Chinese." His eyebrows twitched in a gesture of disbelief, and he emitted a dry, barking laugh.

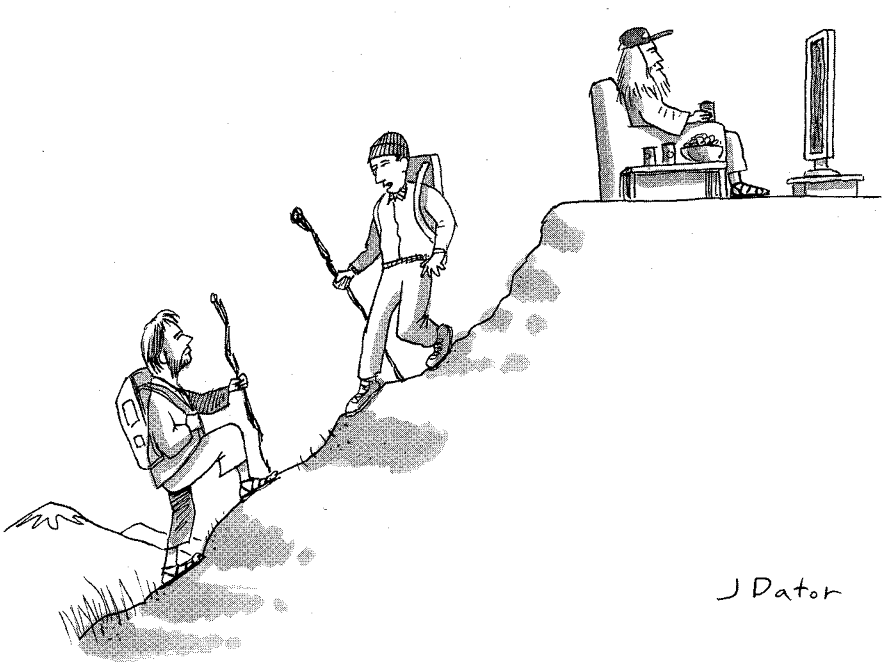
When Anwar was released from prison, in 2004, after six years in solitary confinement, he announced that he would return to politics. Last year, Mahathir was asked by a reporter whether he thought Anwar would ever be the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Mahathir replied that "he would make a good Prime Minister of Israel." So far, it looks as though Mahathir has underestimated his man. Anwar was returned to parliament last year in a landslide (his constituency is in Penang, on the northwest coast). His coalition of opposition parties—which includes both a secular, mostly Chinese party and the Islamists of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, or PAS, as well as his own multi-ethnic People's Justice Party (P.K.R.)—has taken more than a third of the seats in parliament and several state governments. In the next general election, possibly as soon as 2010, Anwar Ibrahim may well become the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

To make sense of Anwar's rise, fall, and rise, it helps to know something about the role of race and religion in Malaysia. The country's population is more than half Malay, defined by ethnicity and the Muslim faith, but large numbers of Chinese (now about a quarter of the population) and Indians (seven per cent) arrived in the nineteenth century, when the British imported coolies from China and plantation workers from India. Tensions arising from this mélange—and, in particular, the fear held by Malays that they will always be bested by these minorities—have gripped Malaysian politics since the country achieved independence from the British, in 1957. In recent years, the situation has been further complicated by a surge in Islamic fervor among many Malays.

Mahathir, whose father had some Indian ancestry, had always been obsessed with race, and the modern era of Malaysian politics can be traced to his book "The Malay Dilemma," published in 1970, a decade before he came to power. It is a distillation of the kind of social Darwinism imbibed by Southeast Asians of Mahathir's cohort through their colonial education. The Malay race, the book argues, couldn't compete with the Chinese for genetic reasons. Whereas the Chinese had been hardened over the centuries by harsh climates and fierce competition, the Malays were a lazy breed, fattened by an abundance of food under the tropical sun. Unfettered competition with the Chinese "would subject the Malays to the primitive laws that enable only the fittest to survive," Mahathir warned his fellow-nationals. "If this is done it would perhaps be possible to breed a hardy and resourceful race capable of competing against all comers. Unfortunately, we do not have four thousand years to play around with."

And so the Malays had to be protected by systematic affirmative action: awarded top positions and mandatory ownership of business enterprises, along with preferential treatment in public schools, universities, the armed forces, the police, and the government bureaucracy. Otherwise the "immigrants," as the ruling party still calls the Chinese and the Indians, would take over.

"The Malay Dilemma" was immediately banned for being divisive. The country was still reeling from the race riots of 1969, when, after a predominantly Chinese party enjoyed an election victory, hundreds of Chinese were attacked by Malays. Killings led to counter-killings. Such intergroup tensions were hardly new: ever since Britain left its former colony, political parties have used ethnic resentments to gain votes, while PAS sought to turn Malaysia into an Islamic state. Presiding over this fraught mosaic of ethnic and religious politics throughout the nineteen-sixties was the aristocratic Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman—until, in the fall of 1970, he was brought down by the brand of Malay nationalism advocated in Mahathir's book.



"I hope you like sports metaphors."

Despite the ban, activists succeeded in distributing copies to nationalistic Malay students. One of them was the young Anwar Ibrahim, then president of the Malaysian Muslim Students Union. Over the decade that followed, Anwar and Mahathir steadily gained influence. By 1981, Mahathir was Prime Minister. A year later, Anwar, who could easily have joined the Islamists in PAS, was brought into the government to help put Mahathir's ethnic theories into practice through the so-called New Economic Policy. He continued to do so until the late nineteen-nineties, when the consequences had become too blatant to ignore: a bloated (in all senses of the word) Malay élite was raking in more and more of the country's wealth; educated young Chinese and Indians were leaving the country in droves; and poor Malays were being kept in a state of fear by the propaganda in public schools and in the state-controlled press. Without their special status, the Malays were told, they would be at the mercy of those rapacious, dominating Chinese "immigrants." Meanwhile, Mahathir's rule had grown increasingly autocratic. In 2003, he was succeeded by the more amiable Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who promised reform but delivered little. Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad, a confidant of Mahathir's, told me that, if anything, corruption has grown worse. "They're making hay while the sun still shines."

To challenge UMNO's ethnic policies is still to court serious trouble. I met Professor Lim Teck Ghee, a Chinese Malaysian and a former World Bank social scientist, at a restaurant in Brickfields, a largely Indian section near the central station of Kuala Lumpur. A soft-spoken man, peering sadly through his glasses, Lim was the director of a leading economic think tank until he published, in 2006, a careful analysis showing that Malays, far from being dominated by the Chinese, actually owned more than forty-five per cent of corporate equity in publicly listed companies. He was quickly vilified for being "anti-national," and he resigned his post.

Lim was one of several people I spoke to in Malaysia who used the word "apartheid" in describing his country. "The ethnic situation has become much worse," he said, especially since Malay nationalism took a strong Islamic turn in the late nineteen-eighties, when the UMNO Party was challenged by the Islamists of PAS. The Islamists got a boost from the Iranian Revolution, and actually took power in the mostly Malay state of Kelantan in 1990. To preëmpt the Islamists, UMNO, ostensibly a secular party, wedded its ethnic nationalism (which was decidedly not a feature of PAS) to religion: Muslims were no longer supposed to drink alcohol; women were encouraged to wear head scarves (*tudung*); easygoing Malay Islam took on the harsher tone of Wahhabi purism.

The increasing conservatism of Malaysian Islam probably stems from insecurity and envy, more than from religious values. Lacking the powerful cultural and historical traditions of the Chinese and the Indians, Malays have been vulnerable to the inroads of Saudi-style Islam. It gives them an identity, a sense of belonging to something stronger than their village traditions. Meanwhile, in Lim's view, educated Malays have been too timid to resist, whatever they might do or say in private. "I've seen it happening with my progressive university friends," Lim said. "Wives take to wearing the *tudung*, the daughters cover up. Their passivity, their silence, is very bad for the community, because it allows the ultras to set the agenda. Islam has become more and more conservative. Muslims can no longer go to non-Malay restaurants or visit the houses of non-Malay friends. Tensions have grown. We're reverting to the colonial situation, where the different races only meet in the marketplace."

Lim's children have already left the country; a daughter is in Seattle, a son in Sydney. He sighed. "Even young Malays are leaving," he went on. "They can't stomach the hypocrisy, the dishonesty." Then he said something that I would hear, over and over, from many others: "The sad thing is that Malaysia could have been so good—we could have been a model of multi-ethnic harmony." A sense of disappointment was palpable in most conversations I had with Chinese and Indian Malaysians, not least among those who once supported the privileging of Malays, in order to redress colonial imbalances and raise the prospects of the rural *bumiputera*, the "sons of the soil." It was also clear that such disillusionment can easily turn to hostility.

I saw Mahathir, whose views are still widely read on his daily blog, Che Det, at a demonstration protesting the Israeli attack on Gaza. As I arrived at the Bangsar Sports Complex, he was finishing his diatribe against "the Jews" and "Jewish atrocities," wildly cheered by groups of schoolchildren in Palestinian-style scarves and black *tudung*. They disappeared as soon as the former Prime Minister, smiling a little menacingly at the young, left the scene. Later, I read in a newspaper that the Malaysian government had planned to mobilize "about five million pupils and 360,765 teachers from more than 10,000 schools," to protest against what posters in the Bangsar Sports Complex termed "Holocaust II."

I looked around the now depleted hall, and was puzzled by posters that read, in Malay, "Stop the atrocities against us." I turned to an elderly Chinese-looking gentleman sitting behind me. "Who is this 'us'?" I asked. With a sly grin, he replied, "Don't you know? It means the Malays." What atrocities had the Israelis perpetrated against the Malays? "Palestinians, Malays—they're all Muslims," the old man said. He shifted his chair closer. "I'm just here to observe," he said, lowering his voice. "I'm not pro-Palestinian at all. I have Jewish friends, you know. Lend a hundred thousand dollars to a Jew and you'll always get it back. Lend it to a Muslim and he'll cheat you, for sure. They're all liars and cheats, the Muslims."

Anwar's daughter, Nurul Izzah, then entered the hall. The sports complex happened to be in her constituency. She had been elected as a member of parliament for the People's Justice Party in 2008. Izzah had not been especially eager to be a politician, having just given birth that year. But when Anwar was imprisoned, and his wife, Dr. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, took his place as an opposition leader, politics became something of a family enterprise.

Nurul Izzah, now twenty-eight, is popular, especially among the young. She has her father's gift for public speaking, and is remarkably beautiful. She got up on the stage and shouted slogans in English about Israel being founded on bloodshed. When she sat down, she whispered to me, "Did you notice how they took away the microphone?" Referring to the official media, she said, "That's how much they love me." The vigorous government campaign against Israel had taken the opposition by surprise, and she felt that she had to make a statement. But the government evidently did not wish to share its Muslim solidarity with the opposition.

I asked Izzah when she started wearing a *tudung*. "Since I was eighteen," she replied. Later that year, her father was jailed. "In the darkest hours, you turn to God. We were never forced into wearing the *tudung*. It was my decision. My father was alarmed." In fact, Izzah was sent to a Catholic convent school outside the capital, and studied international relations at Johns Hopkins. Her best friend is a half-Welsh Catholic. "I can't remember many verses of the Koran," she said, with a polite giggle, "but I felt it was my duty as a Muslim to wear the *tudung*. I did face some challenges." As a student, she told me, "my crowd was mostly liberal. So friends sometimes felt uncomfortable. Couldn't go clubbing and that sort of thing."

Nurul Izzah was asked to run for office, she explained, "because it was important for the P.K.R. to have a young generation that supports multiracial politics. But, you know, to run for the opposition is suicidal for a future career in this country."

Despite what must have been a very difficult childhood, she had a refreshing lack of bitterness, and spoke with a sense of humor, even a guarded optimism. I had noticed this quality in others of her age, including Chinese and Indians, who were working for N.G.O.s, writing blogs, or organizing local communities. Some have backgrounds in the community: I met Indian and Chinese politicians who started in labor unions. Others have studied abroad and decided to return, as activists or journalists. The most popular blogger is the half-Welsh, half-Malay scion of a royal family. (Most Malaysian states still have sultans.) The two founders of Malaysiakini, the country's best online news site, met as students in Australia. Some are religious; many are not. But everyone, even Lim Teck Ghee, a staunch atheist, seems to agree that the chances of Malaysia's becoming a more democratic, less racialist society depend almost entirely on the former Muslim student leader who helped institutionalize Malay nationalism: Anwar Ibrahim.

His arrest in 1998 was probably the making of him as an opposition leader. It came at a time when Malaysian society was beginning to open up, especially on the Internet. One of Mahathir's ambitions was to make Malaysia into an Asian Silicon Valley. Foreign companies were invited to invest in a "Multimedia Super Corridor" between the new international airport and the twin Petronas Towers (also known as Mahathir's Erections), which rise like gigantic pewter cocktail shakers in the center of Kuala Lumpur. An international committee of experts, including Bill Gates, advised Mahathir that if he wished to attract foreign investment, censoring the Internet would be unwise. As a result, Malaysian readers now have access to news and commentary that is independent of the government.

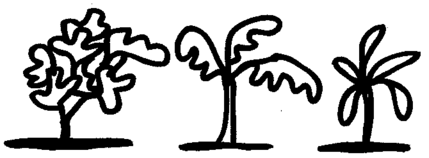
Steven Gan, a Chinese Malaysian, is one of the founders of Malaysiakini.com. Inspired by Anwar's call for *reformasi*, political change, he launched the site with his partner, Premesh Chandran, in November of 1999. On the night of Anwar's arrest, ten thousand people had turned out to listen to his speech against bribery, ethnic discrimination, and rule by decree. *Reformasi* became the rallying cry of all those who felt disaffected by the corrupt autocracy that Malaysia had become. Every Malaysian able to go online knew what Anwar said when he was sentenced at his trial: "I have been dealt a judgment that stinks to high heaven. . . . The corrupt and despicable conspirators are like worms wriggling in the hot sun. A new dawn is breaking in Malaysia. Let us cleanse our beloved nation of the filth and garbage left behind by the conspirators. Let us rebuild a bright new Malaysia for our children."

"When we launched Malaysiakini, we had five hundred readers," Gan told me in a sidewalk café near his office. "By the time the decision went against Anwar in the sodomy trial, we had three hundred thousand." Malaysiakini, which has paid subscribers, actually makes a profit.

One of the effects of Malaysiakini—and of a number of immensely popular bloggers, such as Raja Petra Kamarudin and Haris Ibrahim—is the emergence of a genuinely multi-ethnic debate. Raja Petra is the aristocrat, related to the Sultan of Selangor. Haris is a half-Malay lawyer. Another influential figure is Jeff Ooi Chuan Aun, a Chinese I.T. consultant turned politician. Divisions that exist in daily life seem to fade away online. Malaysiakini is published in English, Malay, Tamil, and Chinese. "Malaysiakini has provided a platform for different communities to express themselves on sensitive issues, like N.E.P., Islam, human rights," Gan says. "More non-Malays are finding their voice. They no longer feel they need to leave their country."

The demonstration on the night of Anwar's arrest was largely a Malay affair; it took a little longer for the minorities to stir in public. Indians had largely supported the ruling National Front, which was led by UMNO and backed by the Malaysian Indian Congress party. This changed in November of 2007, when thousands of Indians marched in the streets to deliver a petition to the British High Commission, insisting that the British take responsibility for the treatment of Indians under colonial rule. It was really a stunt to protest against ethnic discrimination. But the petition never reached the High Commissioner: soldiers and riot police with water cannons and tear gas cracked down on the protesters with maximum force.

"I shall never forget that day," Charles Santiago, an Indian M.P. who took part in the protests, told me. "There was pent-up frustration there before, but that day something snapped." The frustration had many sources: blocked job prospects, discrimination in education and property ownership, destruction of Hindu temples, young Indian men dying mysteriously in police stations and prisons. "The point of the petition was to raise consciousness among Indians about their rights, to embarrass the government," Santiago explained. "But the crackdown was so heavy-handed that even the Chinese became sympathetic to our cause." It was the first time, Santiago said, that "people of all stripes, rich and poor, went into the streets to make a point—this is what broke the back of UMNO." The Malaysian Indian Congress lost heavily in the March, 2008, elections, as did the Malaysian Chinese Association. Many Indians and Chinese voted for Anwar's P.K.R.



But the most important transformation over the past decade probably occurred in the mind of Anwar himself. He had long been critical of government policies, but almost up to the time of his arrest he was still regarded as a rather arrogant UMNO man. I tried to picture the haughty technocrat as he smiled at me in his daughter's sparsely furnished office at the P.K.R. headquarters. All I saw was a charmer, whose fine dark hair, snappy spectacles, and black goatee gave him the air of a jazz-loving hipster of the nineteen-fifties. Even at his own party headquarters, he spoke softly, sometimes in a whisper, aware that anything he said was likely to be overheard.

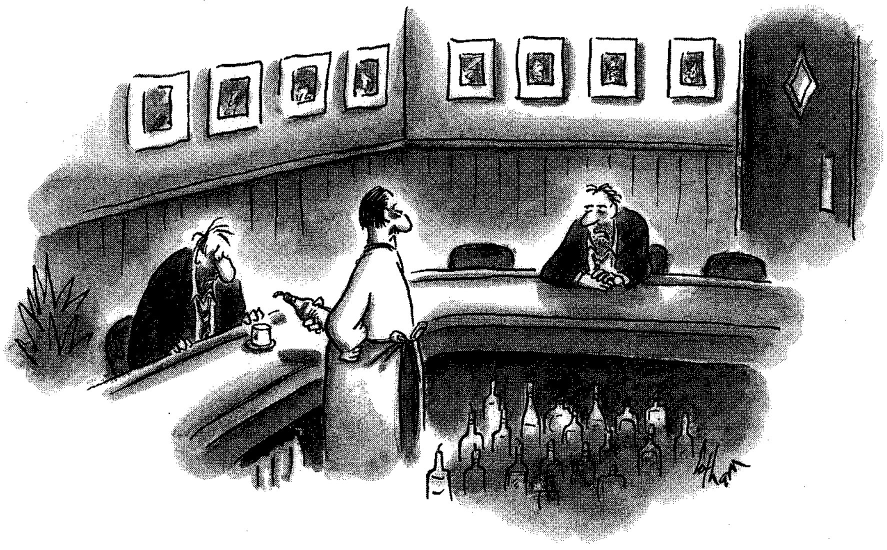
I asked him whether he had expected Mahathir—a man he had known for more than thirty years—to treat him so harshly. "Yes and no," he replied. "I didn't think he'd go that far. I'd seen him destroy opponents, but always short of using physical abuse."

The 1998 trial was a humiliating spectacle, with elements of dark comedy: a mattress with semen stains was produced as evidence in court; police answered charges of abuse by claiming that Anwar had pressed a glass onto his own face. Years of solitary confinement provided much time for thought. "Prison life is such that you have to impose a punishing discipline on yourself," Anwar told me. "Otherwise, you become lethargic, or a psycho." Deprived of books for the first six months, Anwar was eventually allowed to read Tocqueville, Shakespeare, Confucius, the Indian and Arabic classics. He also received a subscription to *The New Yorker*. But there were times when he would have given anything to hear a human voice, even to be scolded by a guard. Family visits were always brief. His children would sing old pop songs to him. Anwar looked wistfully out the window as he sang the first bars of Frank Sinatra's "My Way."

The experience seems to have made him a humbler man. In an interview given three months after his release from prison, he told the Malaysian writer Eddin Khoo, "To be frank and honest, I cannot absolve myself entirely of the excesses of [Mahathir's] administration. There were some things that were beyond our control, other things we simply did not have the courage to address at that time."

A retired Indian civil servant told me about hearing Anwar speak in the district contested by his daughter in 2008. It was near midnight and pouring down rain, yet more than a thousand people waited until Anwar arrived, on the back of a motorcycle, drenched. When he spoke, the crowd fell silent, listening to every word. Then, suddenly, a number of Indians began to shout, in Tamil, "*Makkal Sakti!*"—"People Power! People Power!" And the Malays and Chinese repeated it after them, louder and louder—an unusual demonstration of multi-ethnic solidarity.

Anwar was arrested again, in the summer of 2008, for "sexual assault" on a strapping male aide, but it made no difference to his popularity. Allegations of sexual misconduct had become so clearly political that few people believed them, and the legal proceedings were farcical. Anwar was seized near his home by twenty commandos in balaclavas. The putative victim, who remains under "police protection," is rather strong to be overwhelmed by the much less physically imposing Anwar. The aide swore in a mosque, over the Koran, that he was speaking the truth. When an imam later claimed that he had been forced by superiors to witness these proceedings, he was dismissed. The offense was then changed from "sexual assault" to "consensual sex against the order of nature," even though the aide has yet to be charged. Anwar is not worried. "They just used it to embarrass me, but it did no good," he said. "They lost the elections anyway."



"Hey, investor fears need calming over here, too."

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Anwar has not entirely shed his tendency toward arrogance. Weeks after the opposition won its victory in March of 2008, he announced that he was ready to take over the government that year. This was premature. It's true that the National Front government no longer commands a two-thirds majority in parliament, but there are many problems to overcome before Anwar's coalition of opposition parties is ready to rule the country. It could be another year or two before the next general election. And the current prime minister, Najib Tun Razak, has the image of being a more ruthless operator than his predecessor, the ineffectual Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Najib has been involved in a scandal of his own. A young Mongolian model who was a former mistress of a political crony was found blown to pieces in a jungle clearing near Kuala Lumpur in 2006. At first, it looked like a sordid case of blackmail: she wanted money from her lover, and he, in desperation, had her killed. Then things got more complicated. The men convicted of killing her were police officers in charge of security for top officials. The blogger Raja Petra signed a "statutory declaration" alleging that Najib's wife had been at the scene of the murder. He has since been charged with criminal defamation. Najib has denied any wrongdoing. For the two main contenders for leadership of Malaysia, the truth of the matter might prove to be less important than the public perception. The fact that Anwar appears to be less vulnerable than Najib suggests that the Malaysian public is more inclined to believe a popular blogger than their unpopular Prime Minister.

One man who is desperate for Najib to succeed is Mahathir. When I spoke to Mahathir's confidant Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad, who is a veteran UMNO political operator, about his party's fortunes, he sounded gloomy. UMNO, he told me, is like Chiang Kai-shek's corrupt nationalists in Shanghai in the nineteen-thirties. He ticked off the Party's many ills on his fingers: "corruption, ostentatious living, abuse of power, rank stupidity at the top . . ." So was Anwar going to win? "He will if Najib fails to deliver great changes," Abdullah Ahmad predicted. "Najib wants to, but he can't. He's surrounded by corrupt people."

It's not clear that Najib wants to make big changes, despite recent speeches denouncing corruption in Malaysian politics. Anwar does, but it's unclear whether he will be able to. The entrenched interests—Malay bureaucrats, Army officers, policemen, judges, businessmen, and politicians—will fight to hold on to their privileges. When I asked Anwar about this, he said that such resistance could be managed by reformulating the quotas rather than abolishing them. "Affirmative action would still be acceptable, but based on need, not on race," he said. "I tell PAS that Malays won't lose out. But there are poor Indians, and poor

Chinese, too, who should be helped."

Class rather than race, then? Anwar laughed. "I don't like the word 'class,'" he said. "I'm not a Marxist." He paused, and added, "But Adam Smith mentioned equality many times in his books, too."

An advantage of replacing the rhetoric of race with that of class is that all opposition parties can agree on the ideal of equality. Religion is a more contentious matter. How to reconcile the Islamists and the secularists? Anwar prefers to finesse the problem, by "concentrating on what we have in common, not what divides us." But PAS has stated its desire to introduce *hudud* laws for Muslim citizens—punishing criminal offenses with stoning, whipping, and amputation. Secularist partners in a federal government would find that hard to accept.

"Any party should be free to articulate its ideas," Anwar says. "But no issue should be forced on non-Muslims. When I argue with Muslims, I cannot sound detached from rural Malays, like a typical Malay liberal, or sound like Kemal Atatürk. I would not reject Islamic law out of hand. But without the consent of the majority there is no way you can implement Islamic law as national law."

I mentioned the case of a young Malay woman who no longer believed in Islam and wanted to marry a Christian. To do so, she would have to change her religious status. The secular authorities ruled that this was a matter for the Islamic court, but, of course, no Islamic court (whose authority she, as a nonbeliever, no longer recognized) would ever accede to apostasy. Her predicament has become a test case on the issue of Malay identity. After receiving death threats, she is now in hiding.

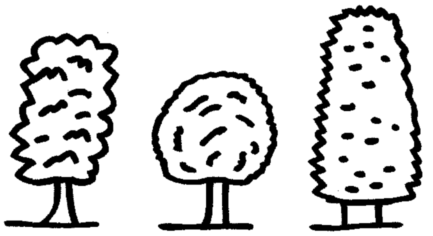
Anwar rolled his eyes. "Islamically, it is indefensible that all Malays should have to be Muslims," he told me. "Not all Arabs are Muslims, after all. But this case has become too political. It is better not to dwell on this issue. We should deal with poverty, rule of law, democracy. . . ." I must have looked unsatisfied. "Look," he said, "I have Malay friends who no longer believe, who drink. But they don't make an issue out of it."

I decided to visit the state of Kelantan, where PAS has been in power since 1990. Islamic laws have been introduced there for Muslims, though they are not always enforced. Muslims cannot drink alcohol. The lights must stay on in movie houses, and only morally acceptable films can be shown. (Some movie houses have gone out of business.) But nobody has been stoned for adultery or had limbs amputated. I drove across the country, through a succession of palm-oil plantations, in the company of Zaid Ibrahim, a wealthy liberal Malay lawyer who had resigned his post as minister of legal affairs in the Prime Minister's office on a matter of principle—the first Malaysian cabinet minister to do so. He was against the arrests of political opponents, including Raja Petra, under the Internal Security Act.

We had met on a Sunday night in Kuala Lumpur a week before we embarked on our trip north. Zaid was happy, because PAS had scored an important by-election victory in the coastal city of Kuala Terengganu, dealing another blow to the National Front. He decided to celebrate the success of the Islamists with a lavish dinner in a fine restaurant. "A good result," Zaid murmured, raising his glass to the men who wanted an Islamic state.

Although PAS won in the city, the state of Terengganu is still in National Front hands. "Look at those buildings," Zaid said, as we drove through Terengganu on the way to Kelantan. We passed a vast stadium, a huge new airport, a gigantic new mosque, a convention center, a university, an "integrity institute." All around these grandiose testimonies to human greed (and, presumably, generous kickbacks) were typical Third World shantytowns: wooden shacks with corrugated iron roofs. "There is no money to be made out of building proper sewage systems or water supplies," Zaid observed, with the dry chuckle of bitter experience.

Kelantan has hardly any huge buildings. Everything in the state capital, Kota Bharu, near the border with Thailand, is built on a modest scale. I met the PAS vice-president, Husam Musa, at the Party headquarters. Husam, an economist by training, is not an imam but one of the new breed of professionals in Islamist politics. He was polite, if a little defensive. On the question of an Islamic state, he said this goal was often misunderstood: "We don't mean a state ruled by clerics but one guided by the holy books. Without the books, we'd be like UMNO and just grab the money. The difference between us and them is that we believe we will be judged in the afterlife."

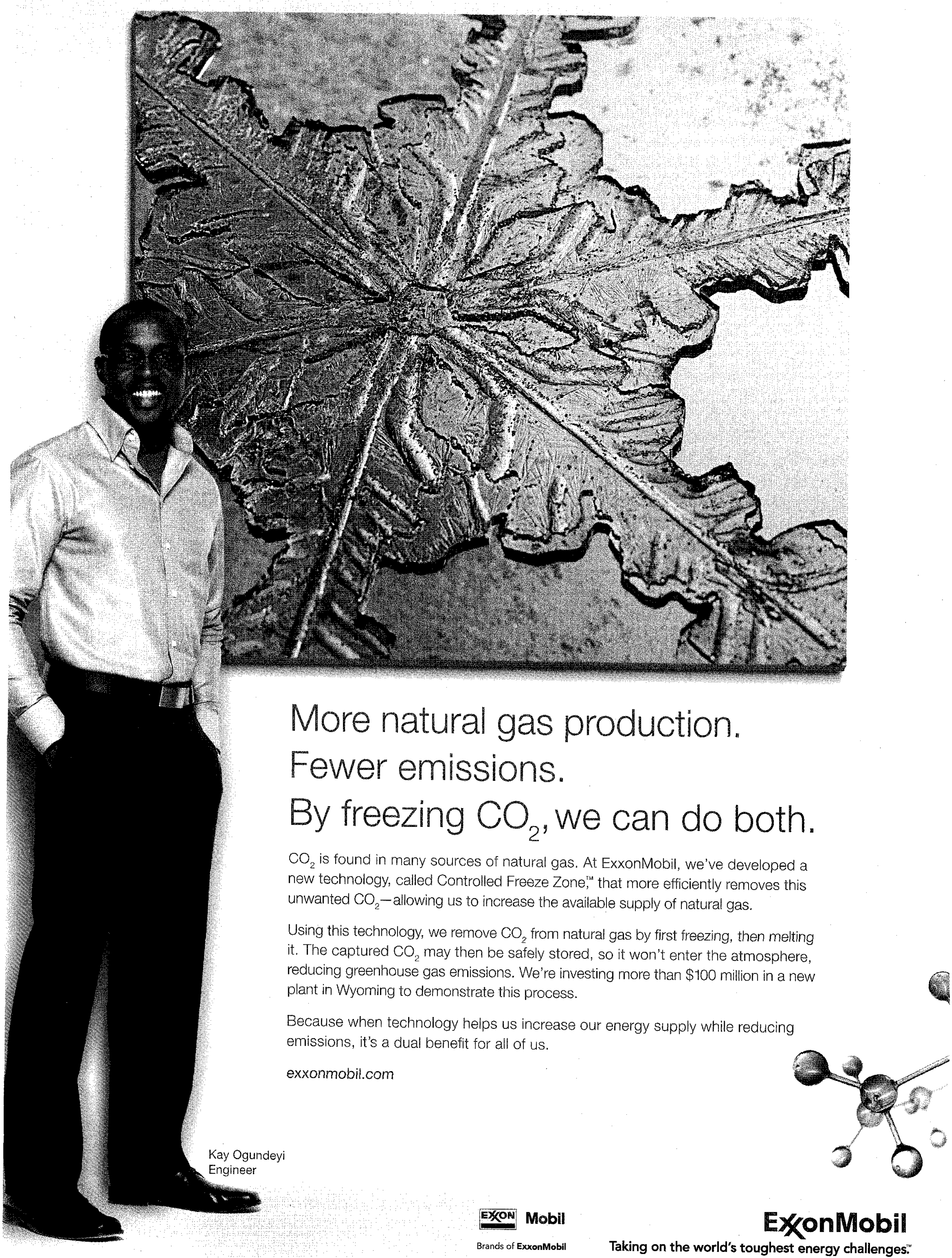


He said that Islam was "pro-progress," and that American democracy was a good model. ("Unfriendly people will accuse me of being pro-American for making this statement.") He also said that discriminating against ethnic minorities was "un-Islamic," as was government corruption. "People should be treated the same, and that includes the freedom of religion," he said.

What about Muslims—were they free to renounce their faith? He averted his eyes. "I have my own opinion about that, but I will reserve it," he said. "Media in Malaysia will interpret it in the wrong way. Everything here is turned to politics." He used "politics" as a pejorative term. "I am not a politician," he said. "I'm a Muslim activist."

Few people in Kelantan, even the Chinese, openly complain about the PAS government. Non-Muslims don't feel hampered by religious rules that don't apply to them, and the lack of corruption is widely acknowledged. Still, given the chance, many young people leave for Kuala Lumpur. Several young Malays told me that it was "no fun" living in a place where you can get arrested for buying a beer. "This is a place for old men," an unemployed building contractor said. "They can sit around and pray all day."

The real Malay dilemma today is that democrats need the Islamists: Malay liberals and secular Chinese and Indians cannot form a governing alliance without religious and rural Malays. And the only serious contender who can patch over the differences between secularists and Islamists for the sake of reform is Anwar, a liberal Malay with impeccable Muslim credentials. "He is our last chance," Zaid told me, as he celebrated the victory of PAS in Kuala Terengganu. When I repeated this to Anwar, he looked thoughtful and said, "Yes, and that's what worries me." ♦



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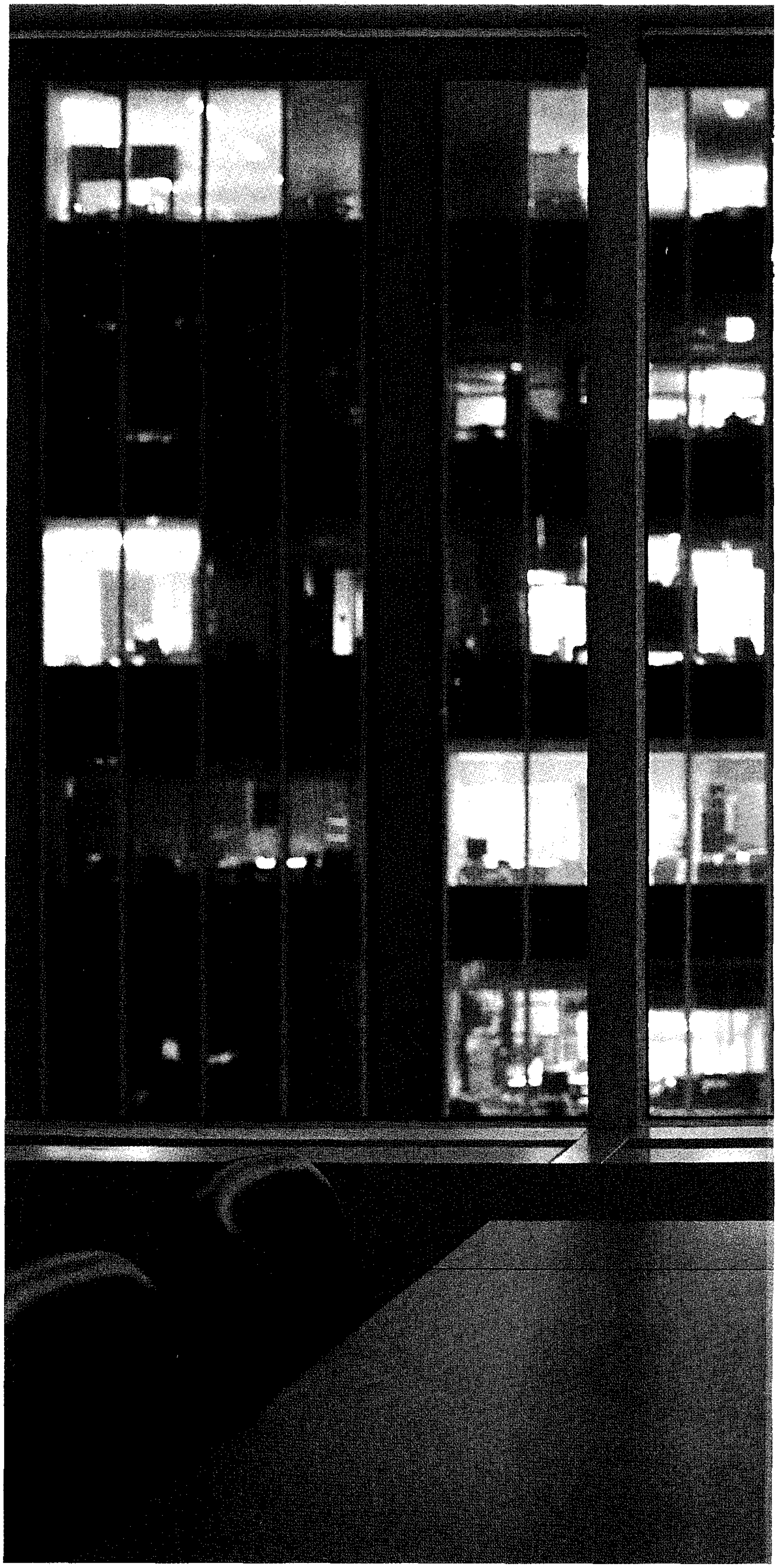
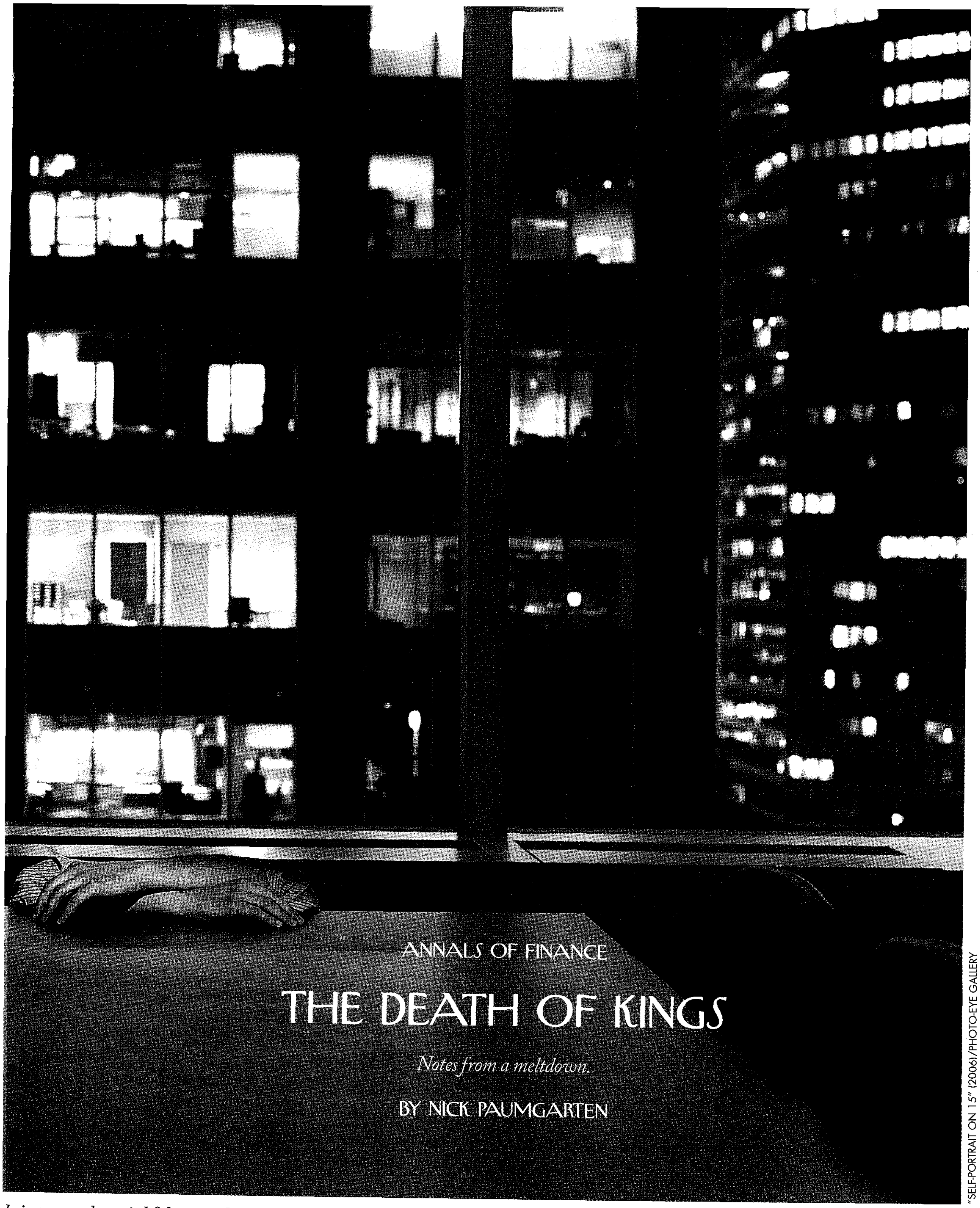
Most people by now may recall a moment of clarity, an inkling of doom. Maybe it helped a guy make money, or at least lose less. Maybe it came too late or went unheeded, so that now it nettles. The majority didn't expect it to be so bad, and wouldn't have been able to profit from or guard against it anyway. The sad fact is that betting against the global financial system requires more than pluck; you need to be a participant. Most of the mechanisms in place for the implementation of pessimism are known only to members of the guild.

I met a Wall Street cynic who had grumbled for years about the overextended consumer, the negative savings rate, and a profligate government that some day would be unable to make good on its promises. He foresaw a grisly end to the credit boom, if not a collapse in the markets for stocks, real estate, art, mediocrity, and foolishness, and yet, like most people, he lacked the conviction and, perhaps, the macroeconomic purview to translate his misgivings into financial gain. He got short too soon and lost heart. Meanwhile, life and the general mood conspired to compound his long position. He bought a house and went to work for a hedge fund—the latecomer playing catch-up, eager for a piece. The markets turned, and the hedge fund went under. One day in March, as the Dow fell to its lowest level in a dozen years, he e-mailed me an investment letter, in which a hedge-fund manager surveyed the world's insolvent banks and unstable sovereigns and anticipated a possible collapse of the global financial and monetary systems—the end of fiat currencies and the beginning of Lord knows what. It concluded that the world needed a "do-over." "Can I have a do-over, please?" the cynic wrote. As a broker said to me, "If it's the end of the world, you only get to bet on it once."

For many, the awakening came while they were driving through some overbuilt exurb in Florida or California, or watching a commercial for a subprime lender ("Mortgage consultants are standing by!"), or studying a graph depicting the ratio of total debt to the gross domestic product. In the early days, intimations of economic imbalance could come to you in a fancy restaurant, or a Home Depot, or an A.T.M. vestibule: a two-hundred-dollar dinner, a traffic jam in bathroom



People assess their own exposure first and then, gradually, the implications for their friends



ANNALS OF FINANCE

THE DEATH OF KINGS

Notes from a meltdown.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

"SELF-PORTRAIT ON 15" (2006)/PHOTO-EYE GALLERY

heir town, the social fabric, and, in the darker hours, the fate of the American experiment. Photograph by Eric Percher.

fixtures, fees on top of fees on top of fees. A pulse of common sense suggests, This can't last.

Some will tell a maid tale, the latter-day equivalent of the stock tip from the shoeshine boy (which, according to lore, persuaded Bernard Baruch and Joseph Kennedy to pull out of the market before the 1929 crash). A private-equity executive I talked to said that he sensed the jig was up when his cleaning woman—"from Nicaragua or El Salvador or wherever the fuck she's from"—took out a subprime loan to buy a house in Virginia. She drove down with her husband every weekend from New York, six hours each way, to fix it up for resale. They cleared sixty-five thousand dollars on the deal, in a matter of months. To many, this would have been proof that America is a land of opportunity, but to him it signalled a fatal imbalance between obligation and means.

One evening, I visited a big-wheel hedge-fund manager in his corner office overlooking Central Park. His epiphany came in the spring of 2007, at a Goldman Sachs hedge-fund conference at the Museum of Modern Art. There were eighty or so people there, almost all of them men, and he calculated that their average income in 2006 had been more than a hundred million dollars. Here were eighty guys who all happened to live in the same part of the world and ply the same trade, and who could not possibly be as smart as their rapid accumulation of dynastic wealth had led them to believe. It was the first time in a long while that he had questioned his own intelligence, or whether there was a limit to what it was worth. He didn't doubt that he was talented, even exceptional—if you harnessed the self-regard in that room, you could light up Los Angeles—but he perceived, in a way that he hadn't before, the inequity of it all, and how corrosive and unsustainable it had become. Too much money, too few hands. Still, he failed to convert this intimation into discipline or conviction; being a billionaire is distracting. He and his partners continued to gorge on highly leveraged assets.

The sky was full of signs. The final one, the big wheel felt, was the opening ceremony at the summer Olympics in Beijing: an estimated three hundred million dollars spent in a single night on a propaganda extravaganza. Many people saw it the way the Chinese wanted them to, as an assertion of capability and might, but to him it was a heedless farewell binge—the great eruption that marked the end of a prodigal age. A month later, Lehman Brothers collapsed, and his business, his net worth, and his reputation were teetering. He was grateful not to be facing ruin. "It's more traumatic to go from thirty million dollars to a million than it is to go from $1.5 billion to a hundred and fifty million," he told me. "There's a level over which it's all just philanthropy." This is what passes for perspective, in those high corner offices.

Some who foresaw the implosion underestimated its power and duration. A young Bostonian named Jeff Lick runs a hedge fund he called Galt Investments, for John Galt, the hero of Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged." (He named his son Roark.) Lick was having an excellent 2008—he'd bet correctly on the collapse of the financials—but in October he closed out his short positions, expanded his long ones, and got trapped. The fund lost nearly half its value. (It has since recovered somewhat.) He wrote to his investors:

> Most of you are rightfully asking yourselves right now, "Given Galt's numbers through September and what was and had been transpiring all year, why didn't you just go to cash and take it easy the rest of the year? . . . Further, you are probably thinking, "I am less concerned about what specifically happened in October than I am about the poor business judgment you have shown in general." To these charges I plead guilty by reason of youth, inexperience, greed, hubris and temporary insanity. There are simply no good answers to the questions posed above.

No good answers: it depends on one's definition of "good." However dramatic and abrupt the events of September were, when Lehman failed and the government rescued Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and A.I.G., the meltdown was not so sudden. The pace of upheaval slows and accelerates, although the underlying conditions—crushing debt up and down the food chain and all around the world—remain relatively constant. The difficulties manifest themselves, one after the other, as their effects ripple through the system. In September, very few people, around here at least, were aware that more than half of the mortgages in Poland were denominated in Swiss francs, not zlotys, and that, if the zloty collapsed, Poland's homeowners and their lenders would be devastated. Yet the precarious arrangement was there all along, for anyone who looked. The dance of revelation and recognition is not well synchronized.

This thing we're in doesn't yet have a name. It is variously called, in placeholder shorthand, the global financial meltdown, the financial crisis, the credit crisis, the recession, the great recession, the disaster, the panic, or the bust. It long ago metastasized beyond the subprime mess, which was merely a catalyst—the first whiff, the last straw. A text-friendly acronym, ITE, for "in this economy," has started to get around, in sales pitches and head-count meetings, but it doesn't do the work.

This thing is enormous and all-pervading, evolving and ongoing, history-altering yet in many respects banal. It is a persistent state, like the weather, or a chronic illness. In some circles—financial professionals in Manhattan, regulators in Washington, central bankers in Europe, or the owners of cash-strapped businesses, to say nothing of the millions of people who have been laid off or whose houses have been foreclosed on—this thing is, in its various incarnations, pretty much the only subject of conversation. The loss of a job, a home, a college fund, or one's dignity is both a symptom of the collective disaster and a contributor to its deepening. People assess their own exposure first and then, gradually, the implications for their friends, their town, the social fabric, and, in the darker hours, the fate of the American experiment.

In a way, the financial crisis is like a plague or a war, except that the pestilence and carnage are metaphorical. Some have compared it to Hurricane Katrina, but Katrina occurred suddenly, and then all was aftermath. In this case, it's as though the levees failed anew every day. We stay on the porch, carrying on with our card game, in water up to our necks. War (putting aside the question of whether it's the inevitable result of all this) fails as an analogue, too: there is an enemy to shoot at, and the destruction is so gruesome that it is hard to mistake wartime for normalcy. An economic meltdown can camouflage itself in the commonplace. It is more like radiation. It's everywhere, but you can't see or smell it. And then a neighbor loses her job or her hair.

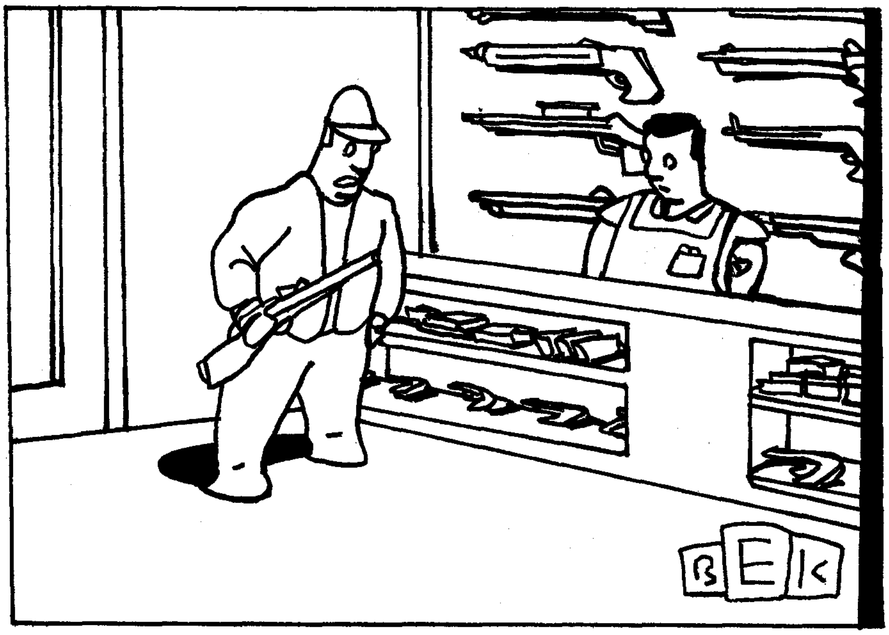
We are a visual species. In an economic crisis, in the early stages, at least (and we are likely still in the early stages, in spite of all the recent happy talk), the visible effects are subtle, if they are present at all. Maybe there are empty seats at the game. It is a mathematical predicament, an abstraction that expresses itself in dreary reports that don't affect you, until they do. Deferred dreams aren't news. Even the worst consequences—homelessness, hunger, untreated illness, everything short of civil unrest or outright revolution—aren't spectacles. The history-making developments—the collapses of great or at least large institutions, the government's deployments of sums beyond imagining, the exchange of gigantic liabilities for even more gigantic ones in the future, the effects these things have on geopolitics—are difficult to picture. People grasp at anecdotal observation: store closures, idle spouses, a rash of attacks by a mugger (a mugger!) with a pipe. The immigrants are going home.

Pictures from the thirties of breadlines or dairy farmers pouring out milk mean something to us now because we have a name for the Great Depression, and a discrete sense of the whole. This doesn't look like anything yet. The cities aren't crumbling; the Plains aren't turning to dust; your four grandparents are not sharing a bed, like Charlie Bucket's. Business-section editors settle for pictures of brokers on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, choosing subjects whose facial expressions best capture whatever mood it is that the commentators have decided to blame or credit for that day's market fluctuations. Never mind that the guys on the floor don't always make money when the market goes up, or lose it when it goes down, or that they are the vestigial human practitioners on an otherwise mostly electronic exchange that represents but a sliver of the capital markets. You may as well have a photograph of a man fixing a flat tire or a child with a skinned knee.

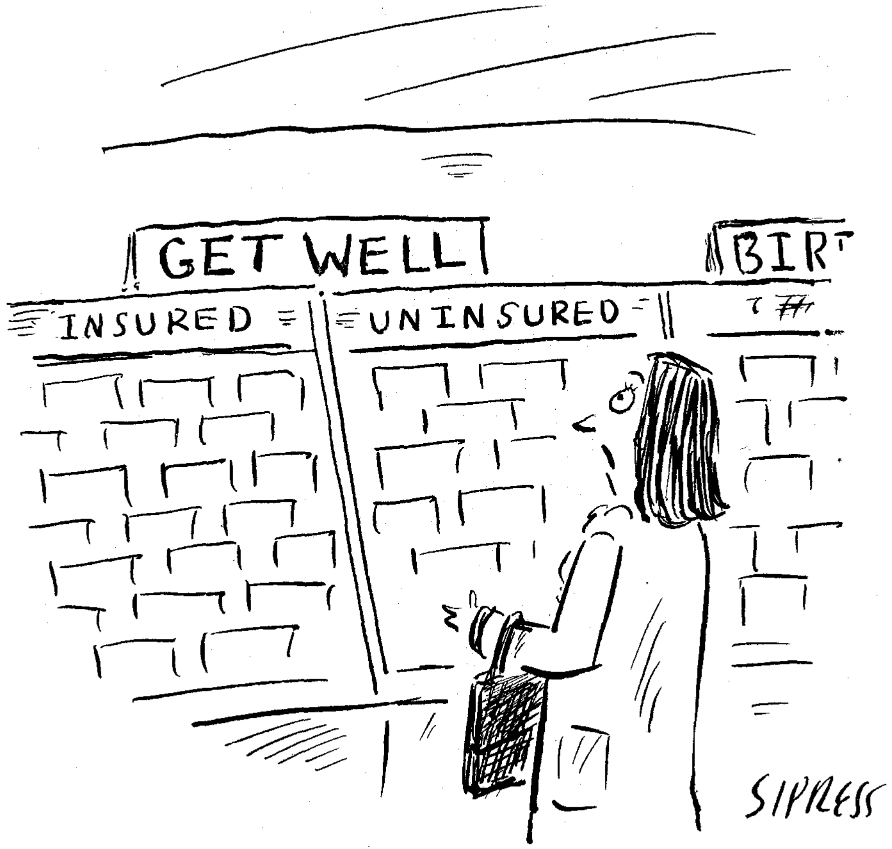
A piece of corporate jargon sprouted up recently: "optics," as a synonym for "appearances"—something that looks good or bad, in a public-relations sense. When a broken-down bailout recipient like Citigroup tries to pay its top executives gigantic bonuses or to acquire a new private jet, it has failed to consider the optics. Jets and junkets can be visualized, as can bonuses, if only as pallets of cash in a Swiss bank vault, and so they make better targets for popular resentment and politicians' umbrage than some more arcane allotment mechanisms, like special-purpose vehicles and side pockets. (Of course, spending fifty million dollars in taxpayer money on a new jet looks bad because it is bad.) The news that A.I.G., the most egregious bailout pit of them all, was giving out a hundred and sixty-five million dollars in bonuses and "retention payments" stirred civilian outrage and drew a rebuke from the President. Heinous optics. But the sums were tiny in comparison with those likely to be deployed for the purchases, by private investors and the government, of toxic assets on the ailing banks' books. These are assets that the banks have been unable or unwilling to unload on the market. In other words, for the plan to work, the government must allow itself to be gulled. But the arrangement doesn't look like anything yet. It has no optics.

Similarly, we are fixated on Bernie Madoff, the money manager who admitted to running a multibillion-dollar Ponzi scheme, because, in part, he is larceny incarnate. He embodies many of the meltdown's traits—the illusion of expertise, the belief in getting something for nothing, the mirage and subsequent evaporation of wealth. But Madoff is in some ways a distraction, cover for the quiet crooks. It's telling, the way that people take his thin-lipped grin for an unrepentant smirk, instead of, say, a nervous tic. It's his face—and his Upper East Side penthouse—that people have come to resent, rather than the culture of easy money and magical thinking that allowed him to thrive.

By now, most of the systemic flaws have been identified, explained, and lamented, if not yet collated or changed. In congressional testimony, the disgraced C.E.O.s of failed institutions—Richard Fuld, of Lehman Brothers; Martin Sullivan, of A.I.G.—talked about a "financial tsunami" that caught them unaware, as though they had not figured in the plate tectonics. Their obliviousness is half credible; they may not have understood, or wanted to understand, the assets and the risks that lurked on (and off) their firms' balance sheets; but the potential for catastrophe was clear to see, for all who had eyes to see it, and men like Fuld and Sullivan were paid tens of millions of dollars to have or hire such eyes. There were people inside those firms who knew exactly what they were up to. So to claim ignorance or helplessness is to admit to negligence, or to tell a lie. It grated when, last fall, Donald Trump tried to get out of paying debts by claiming that the economic meltdown was a "force majeure"—the legal equivalent, basically, of an act of



"Do you have any organic bullets?"



God—and not a logical outcome of a set of observable circumstances. The real-estate bubble was not a great secret.

What's most vexing is that those who saw trouble didn't do more to stop it, and that those who failed to see trouble were ever paid anything at all to run financial firms. One of the central flaws of the system is that naysayers were silenced. If you worked at an investment bank and made a stink about the level of risk, you were likely pushed aside. If you managed money and eschewed leverage, your returns sagged and investors went elsewhere.

This crisis is the culmination of events and trends reaching back, depending on your perspective, four, seven, seventeen, twenty-two, twenty-seven, thirty-eight, sixty-five, or a hundred and two years. The subprime-mortgage meltdown, the subsequent collapse of the wider real-estate market and then of securities based on real estate, and of the firms and funds holding those securities, and of the companies selling insurance against the failure of those firms, and, potentially, of the insurers' counterparties, and so on: you could say that all this is merely the finale to a multi-decade saga set on Wall Street and Main Street, in Washington, Riyadh, and Tokyo. The causes are technological, mathematical, cultural, demographic, financial, economic, behavioral, legal, and political. Among the dozens of contributors and culprits, real or perceived, are the personal computer, the abandonment of the gold standard, the abandonment of Glass-Steagall, the end of fixed commissions, the ratings agencies, mortgage-backed securities, securitization in general, credit derivatives, credit-default swaps, Wall Street partnerships going public, the League of Nations, Bretton Woods, Basel II, CNBC, the S.E.C., disintermediation, overcompensation, Barney Frank and Chris Dodd, Phil Gramm and Jim Leach, Alan Greenspan, black swans, red tape, deregulation, outdated regulation, lax enforcement, government pressure to lower lending standards, predatory lending, mark-to-market accounting, hedge funds, private-equity firms, modern finance theory, risk models, "quants," corporate boards, the baby boomers, flat-screen televisions, and an indulgent, undereducated populace. All these factors, very few of them mutually exclusive, conspired to make possible skyrocketing leverage, misperceived risk, and spectacular collapse. To tell the story of them all, in the proper context and detail, will require an Edward Gibbon. The fall of Rome, by comparison, was a local event. Much abridged, a few familiar words will do: debt, greed, hubris.

After Lehman went under, I began calling around, looking for rabbis. Many were happy to talk but not on the record, even though they generally saw their own enterprises as unfairly maligned or above reproach. (This did not always hold true for the employees, past and present, of Bank of America and Merrill Lynch.) The Gnostics of finance are predisposed to secrecy. It's often hard to tell whether their discretion is valorous, mendacious, guilt-ridden, grandiose, or merely vain. It's a guise for all seasons. Even candid acquaintances dispense big-picture bromides ("This too shall pass," or "We're screwed"), rather than reveal whatever furtive transactional trickery they may have witnessed.

It can be startling to discover how many offices in Manhattan have spectacular views. The first time you gain admission to an aerie in the G.M. Building or some other blue-chip tower and look out across Central Park, SoHo, New Jersey, or Queens, you think that this particular office must be the finest in town, the seat of secret power, the heart of the plot. But the city is full of them. It's one of the things about tall buildings: you can see a lot, such as other office towers of different vintages, commenced in past booms. The takeoffs and landings at the airports, the shipping lanes, the humans below reduced to units: it is easy to begin to think abstractly about the armature of empire. Sitting up there and talking for hours about pools of securitized debt, and seeing them depicted on dryboards or PowerPoint slides as rectangular blocks, divided into tranches, you can find yourself viewing the buildings out the window as manifestations of that debt—the conversion of financial cunning into steel, brick, and glass. You also happen to be looking at the collateral.

I heard versions of the same story, emphasizing the elements that most flattered the teller's ideological or professional bias. He tended to say, "It's very simple," and then after twenty minutes chuckle a bit as the threads unravelled and his narrative became "Tristram Shandy." It could be exhilarating to take on the welter of causation and consequence, but clarity was fleeting, more of a mood than an all-encompassing grasp; there must be an endorphin that's triggered by the call-and-response recapitulation of a giant variegated clusterfuck. When it dissipates, you're left only with the conviction that our troubles are deep.

A prevailing belief is that there has been some conspiracy on Wall Street to bilk people out of their money. If there was a conspiracy, it was an extremely broad, disorganized, decentralized, and, in some measure, inadvertent one. In other words, there was no conspiracy, unless that's what you call the establishment of an oligarchy, over several generations and with the assistance of a blinkered populace.

One day, a hedge-fund manager in Europe suggested that I talk to a man named Colin Negrych. He had got to know Negrych a decade ago, when Negrych was the host of an informal nightly gathering for financial eccentrics and renegades at Bice, an Italian restaurant in midtown. "I'm a macroeconomic and geopolitical strategist disguised as a bond salesman," Negrych told me, when I called him. "I write my clients Bloomberg messages and tell them what they should do." (He also said, "Every time I read some financial guy talking in the press, I just think he's a self-aggrandizing asshole. Why would I want to do that?" Eventually, he decided to talk to me, out of the conviction that the dire moment called for candor.)

Negrych is part market philosopher, part screen savant—a nexus of market intelligence. Among his clients are some of the most venerated investors in the world, who prize his discretion and his idiosyncratic advice. He has helped them make billions and has shaved off a bit for himself, most of which he has given away. His employer is a small, privately held broker/dealer called Barclay Investments (which bears no relation to the British Barclays that bought parts of Lehman Brothers out of bankruptcy).

Eleven years ago, Negrych, who is fifty-one, was given a diagnosis of lymphoma, and since then he has worked at home, most recently in a town house he rents near Washington Square Park. He has not gone to the office since at least 2000. (According to Negrych, the firm has made "extraordinary efforts to meet and exceed every compliance requirement related to allowing me to work from home.") The first time I visited, the door to the street was open. I walked up to the second floor, where I found him in a sparse, dimly lit room, sitting at a giant desk, staring at a pair of computer screens. He had on a plaid bathrobe, moccasin slippers, a baseball cap, and owlish eyeglasses. He was pale and a little fleshy, with a goatee and kind eyes. A colonnade of prescription pills occupied a corner of the desk. He was smoking a cigarette. A humidifier spouted mist.

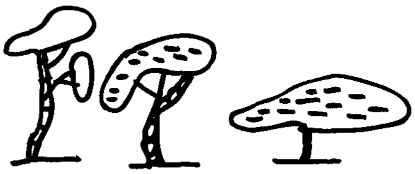
"There are two things about human beings that I know for sure," he told me. "One is that everyone wants to be the center of the universe. And the other is that they all want to see what they own go up in value all the time."

Negrych, I quickly surmised, is not all human: he welcomes a ritual repricing with the relish of Colonel Kilgore smelling napalm at dawn. Negrych was the first person I talked to who advanced the notion, which later became more popular, that letting Lehman fail was neither a mistake nor a cause of anything, any more than Pearl Harbor was the cause of the Second World War. For him, the fault lies with the facts—unquenchable debts and the attempts by Lehman and the entire financial system to obfuscate their existence—and not with any capitulation to those facts, however sloppy that capitulation got. Just because it cost a lot of people a lot of money didn't make it wrong. As he later summed it up to me by e-mail:

> Folks were shocked to find the U.S. government unwilling to throw good money after bad at Lehman. This discovery caused market participants to question whether the government would support other large financial entities which they knew to be, or strongly suspected of being, in financial distress, when this support had previously been taken as a given.

And:

> Lehman and its bad positions were akin to a dog stumbling around with a chunk of uranium dangling from its collar. It was just cruel to allow it to remain in misery and be a threat to others.



Or, as he put it, quoting the country songwriter Robbie Fulks, "It's a full-blown chore overlookin' what's plain to see."

The markets were plummeting, and the public's consternation was in some respects, to Negrych, a disappointment. "There seems to be an unwritten rule that this can't be allowed to happen," he said. "So much effort is put into sustaining the stock market and home prices. This whole culture has been set up to see stocks and homes as annual riskless investments. They most assuredly are not." He had taken off his moccasins; as he talked, he responded to the chirps of incoming messages with flurries on the keyboard. The screens' glow lit his face and made it appear almost to be floating over the desk.

"Banks are going under because they are undercapitalized. People are going bankrupt. Assets are dropping in value. There is too much debt," Negrych said. "Jim Grant"—the financial writer—"had a phrase: 'the incessant degradation of the stigma of debt.' Debt is the story."

He went on, "What constituency is there for pessimism? People believe optimism is necessary, an American right. The presumption of optimism is the problem. That's what creates the debt we have now." (As a well-regarded French investor said to me one day, with a sigh, "There is no spirit of resignation in the American people." Most of us would probably regard this as a virtue.)

Negrych moved to the town house in 2005, after selling a capacious Upper West Side penthouse apartment to a television actor for far more than he had paid for it, in 2002. Around the time of the sale, he ran into an acquaintance, a laid-off baker working part-time as a bicycle messenger, who told Negrych that he'd bought a co-op in Brooklyn. A bank had lent him not only the full purchase price but also enough to cover five years of interest payments. "This was a guy who used to complain to me about the price of shampoo," he said. It didn't take long for Negrych, a man of skeptical inclinations and immersive habits (to check up on me, he not only read everything I'd ever written but somehow got hold of my wife's undergraduate thesis and read that, too—something I've never done), to conclude that this was a bubble. He started pressing his clients to short housing-related assets in early 2006, and stocks in 2007.

"What Wall Street offers is the continual rationalization that ever-increasing indebtedness is sustainable," he told me. "It concocts believable, defensible arguments for the prices that they think things ought to be. Financial engineering fills the gap between people's desires and their wherewithal. So what you have is optimism buttressed by pseudo-science and statistical legerdemain."

Night had fallen. Negrych, sepulchral in the glow of his screens, had settled into an epigrammatic rhythm—"Wall Street is a roach walking around on a dinosaur"; "It's the symptom, not the disease"—which, after a while, prompted him to apologize for incoherence. He had taken some morphine. "I'm in massive pain," he said. "I have a tumor on my spine. I need to get it burned away."

The roach may survive, but not in the way we have come to know it. It is now commonplace and not entirely bombastic to declare that Wall Street is dead. This refers to the extinction or mutation not only of the old bulge-bracket firms but also of the caste that has found haven and easy riches there, the hundreds of thousands of workers, many of them neither extraordinarily skilled or highly trained, who perhaps mistook the fruitions of cheap credit for proof of their own acumen and flair. What has also run aground is a revolution in finance dating back to the nineteen-seventies.

The term "Wall Street" refers, often, to the matrix connecting the shrinking operations in Lower Manhattan with practitioners in Greenwich, Chicago, London, Geneva, the Canary Islands, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. Or else it stands for an array of firms that now, after the convulsions of last fall, exist in such diminished and altered condition that the term has ceased to mean what it used to. Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, and Bear Stearns are gone, and Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs have morphed, technically at least, into bank holding companies—granting them better access to government capital in exchange for more regulatory oversight. Over the past four decades, the old firms had already undergone a tortuous process of consolidation, and transformed themselves from private partnerships into publicly traded companies. They did this to raise equity capital, and to enrich their executives and employees—that is, they found a way to cash out.

The abandonment of the private partnerships was a key ingredient in the world-destroying self-immolation of the last few years. In a partnership, you owned a share of the firm, and therefore a stake in its long-term well-being. In a public company, you were paid each year according (more or less) to your profits or fee generation, regardless of the outcome, down the road, of the deals you did or the loans you made or the assets you took on. You had an incentive to generate inflated or ephemeral gains, and, often, little incentive not to. The amazing thing about the piggishness of the last decade is that, in a certain light, most people, according to the strictures of their self-interest (whether enlightened or not), behaved rationally.

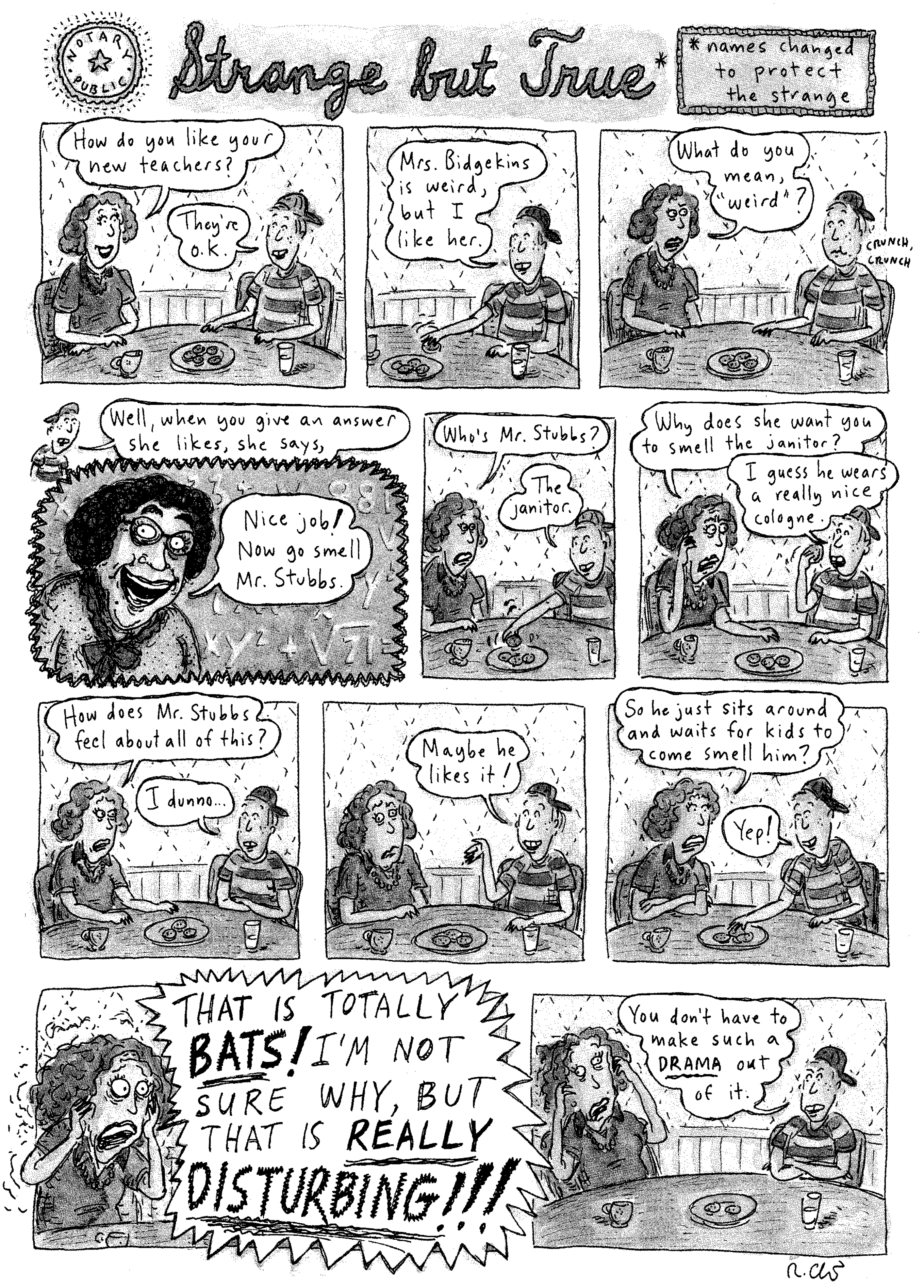
One day, I went to see David Beim, who retired from Wall Street in 1990 to teach at Columbia Business School. He started, in the mid-sixties, at First Boston, during the era of the Nifty Fifty—a frothy time in the markets which hardly left a mark on the culture at large. (Among the icons of 1968, Alfred Winslow Jones may not be the first to spring to mind.) Investment banking was a placid business; the cream went into medicine or the law. It was value added just to call a company's finance officer, in Cleveland or Tulsa, to tell him his stock price. There were no desktop computers. People used graph paper and calculators, pencils and rulers.

Still, investment banking (underwriting securities, advising companies) was sexier than commercial banking (making loans). In 1977, Beim went to work for Bankers Trust, a commercial bank that was desperate to become an investment bank. "My Wall Street friends were appalled," Beim said. "It was so second-rate." Bankers Trust was one of the pioneers at pushing the limits of Glass-Steagall, the Depression-era law that separated commercial and investment banking. At the time, Citibank and J. P. Morgan were quietly trading a new product called interest-rate swaps, which are a form of protection against unforeseen swings in rates. This was among the earliest derivatives, one of the original structured products. Beim said to himself, "This is fabulous. We could make a lot of money with this. I wanna do a swap." Derivatives made many Bankers Trust executives and traders very wealthy and then, after a series of scandals and bad trades in the mid-nineties, contributed to the firm's demise. A pattern emerged.

By that time, modern finance theory—the notion, borne of some elegant mid-century mathematics, that one could use models to value contingencies—had taken root in the world of financial practice. It gradually obscured "the sheer brute fact that the results of human activity cannot be anticipated," as the economist Frank Knight wrote in 1921. Yet anticipate it people did, or tried to, on trading desks and conference calls, amid what Beim called "a rise in complexity." Mathematicians and physicists, cut loose by the decline of the space program, gravitated to Wall Street and began devising ways to measure, price, and package risk. It was a kind of decentralized Manhattan Project.

There were other factors at work. On May 1, 1975—recalled now as May Day—Wall Street abandoned the practice of charging customers a fixed commission to trade stock. In the past, the firms had taken forty cents for each share traded, regardless of the customer or the size of the trade. Under competitive pressure from discount brokerages like Charles Schwab, firms began lowering their commissions until trading itself was no longer so lucrative. They sought profit in other lines—fancy ways of trading and financing things. An arms race evolved, in which firms developed ever more sophisticated proprietary products, options, swaps, and derivatives. In time, the banks became glorified hedge funds, trading these things for themselves.

In the late nineteen-seventies and the early eighties, a few pioneers, chief among them Lewis Ranieri, at Salomon Brothers, and Laurence Fink, at First Boston, invented and evangelized new methods of securitizing debt. They pooled assets that yielded a regular flow of payments (mortgages, car loans, credit-card receivables, etc.) and then divided the pool into tranches, ranked according to the order of repayment. Pieces of each tranche are sold to investors as securities—a claim on a portion of the payments. The senior tranches get paid back first but yield less. The equity tranches, last in line, get paid more to take on the higher risk of not being paid at all. The idea is to spread and


NOTARY PUBLIC
Strange but True*
* names changed to protect the strange
How do you like your new teachers?
They're o.k.
Mrs. Bidgekins is weird, but I like her.
What do you mean, "weird"?
CRUNCH, CRUNCH
Well, when you give an answer she likes, she says,
Nice job! Now go smell Mr. Stubbs.
Who's Mr. Stubbs?
The janitor.
Why does she want you to smell the janitor?
I guess he wears a really nice cologne.
How does Mr. Stubbs feel about all of this?
I dunno...
Maybe he likes it!
So he just sits around and waits for kids to come smell him?
Yep!
THAT IS TOTALLY BATS! I'M NOT SURE WHY, BUT THAT IS REALLY DISTURBING!!!
You don't have to make such a DRAMA out of it.

R.Ch

therefore mitigate the risk of lending, and in turn lower the cost of borrowing.

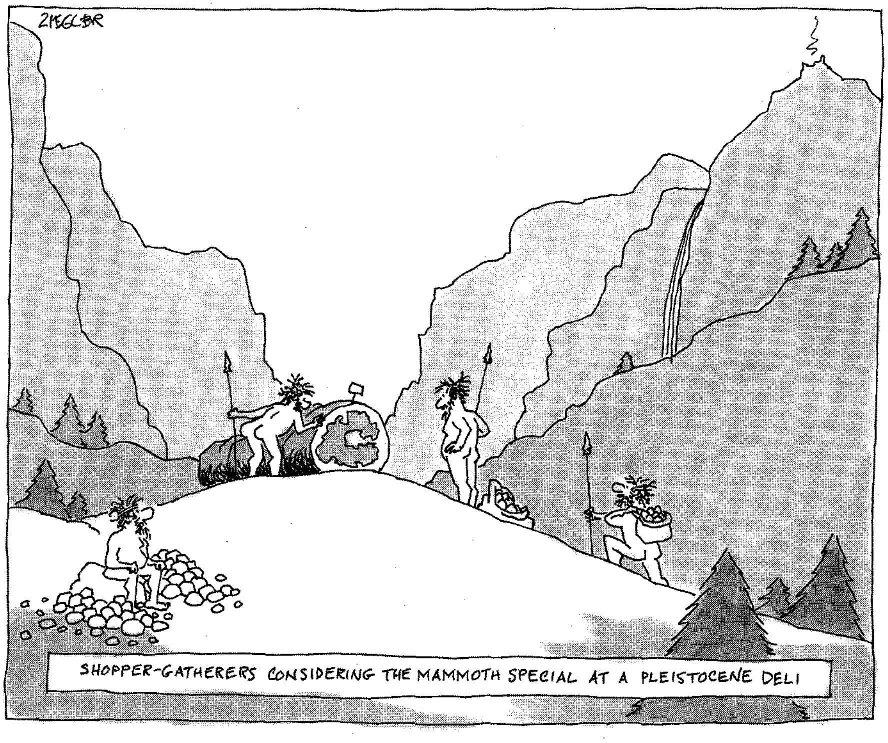
Securitization, invented on Wall Street to make the people who worked there rich, made it much easier for Americans, and America, to borrow far more than they had before. It helped banks get their loans off their balance sheets and free up capital, so that they could lend, and therefore earn, more. It established a new lending apparatus, via the capital markets: the so-called "shadow" banking system. It begat more borrowing, which begat more buying, which begat higher asset prices, which begat more borrowing. In the annals of invention, securitization, on impact alone, ranks somewhere between air-conditioning and irrigation. The price of things came to be determined largely by how easily they could be financed. A long-term decline in interest rates, promoted and abetted by the Federal Reserve, helped create a perpetual-motion machine that encouraged people to borrow, buy, and borrow some more. The savings rate plummeted.

A few years ago, I was signing a check with a blue translucent ballpoint pen stamped with the logo of Commerce Bank, and I realized, suddenly, that these pens were everywhere. I wondered about it for a second and then let it pass.

Commerce, a retail and commercial bank based in New Jersey, was founded in 1973 by Vernon Hill II, who had developed sites for McDonald's. He aimed to bring the brand loyalty of the fast-food business to the local bank. The branches, which he called "stores," stayed open seven days a week, often well into the night. There were no fees, and free lollipops and dog biscuits in the lobby. He aimed for what he called "a unique brand of WOW." The bank was very successful. Hill built for himself and his family one of the biggest private homes in the state of New Jersey. In 2006, the bank gave away twenty-eight million pens, which found their way into the kitchen drawers and jacket pockets, as well as into the collective doodad mind, of consumers up and down the Northeast coast.

The margins in commercial banking are fairly tight. Commerce paid low interest rates, but, still, how was it able to afford the generous service and buckets of free pens? It turns out that the bank had on its balance sheet an unusually high number of mortgage-backed securities. The secret behind the WOW was M.B.S. The pens were, in a way, a precipitate of the shadow banking system, a by-product of securitization. Finding one was a little like stumbling on an empty crack vial in a public park.

In 2007, after regulators took issue with business that the bank was doing with entities controlled by Hill's family, Hill was forced to resign, and Commerce was sold to TD Bank Financial Group. Commerce is gone. You may still come across a pen now and then.



SHOPPER-GATHERERS CONSIDERING THE MAMMOTH SPECIAL AT A PLEISTOCENE DELI

"I have some esoteric ideas," Simon Mikhailovich told me. We were in a conference room in his offices, facing the Empire State Building. Mikhailovich, who emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1978, is an investment-fund manager who specializes in distressed structured credit, including collateralized debt obligations (C.D.O.s), formerly high-flying and now leaden assemblages of securitized debt. He was among the pioneering misfits who, in late 2005, sensed that the loans underlying many C.D.O.s, subprime and otherwise, were lousy and unlikely to be repaid. "Leveraging overpriced assets never worked for anyone," he said.

He applied the analogy of poultry. You can turn a bunch of whole chickens into packages of chicken parts, of ascending quality, from gizzards to breasts, and charge a premium for the best cuts. The butcher gets paid, and the shopper gets what he wants. The problem was, eventually, that gizzards were packaged as breasts. And then there was the salmonella. This reminded me of a cruder fowl-related C.D.O. critique: "You can't make chicken salad out of chicken shit."

Mikhailovich's roster of culprits begins with the desktop computer, which encouraged tweaking the data and models until they said what you wanted them to. "If the numbers didn't work, then you made them work," he said. "There is the seduction of those huge profit projections in the last column."

Mikhailovich reserves his greatest scorn, however, for the ratings agencies—principally, Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's—the ones that determine a debtor's creditworthiness. Their work is necessary; no one would be able to root through the contents of every C.D.O. on his own. Banks and bondholders need food tasters. But the ratings agencies were paid by the packagers of the C.D.O.s to issue the ratings that made the C.D.O.s attractive—and they routinely put AAA, or almost zero-risk, ratings on tranches of C.D.O.s which consisted of loans or mortgages that soon went bad. It is true: the peddlers of the chicken shit paid to have it magically pronounced chicken salad, a conflict of interest that most investors ignored. The recipe may have originated in the mathematical models of the banks, but it acquired its irresistible allure with the acquiescence of the raters, whether it was winking or pie-eyed. "They were the ultimate fulcrum, the enablers," Mikhailovich said.

One reason that the ratings were so important—besides laziness—was that the regulators declared them so. A series of regulatory refinements, culminating in 2004, in a set of rules known as Basel II, enshrined the raters as semi-official arbiters of creditworthiness. According to the regulatory regime, banks could take on more leverage with less capital in reserve if their assets were rated AAA. "Banks developed an insatiable demand for AAA credit risk," Mikhailovich said. "But there are only so many companies out there that qualify for AAA rating." And so the international debt cartel built laboratories for the creation of synthetic debt—credit-default swaps, which weren't debt but, rather, bets on other debt. These were also pooled and sliced into tranches that, too often, acquired the AAA stamp. Securitization had turned into alchemy.

"Financial engineering tapped into a strain in the investor's mind by replacing uncertainty with the appearance of certainty," Mikhailovich said. Certainty came in a guise of inscrutability; the products designed to reassure also happened to befuddle. Many of the people responsible for evaluating the engineering considered their mystification to be further proof of its brilliance. They were, like Bernie Madoff's investors, comforted by their own ignorance.

The shadow banking system went haywire during the housing boom. Each firm had its structured-product samurai, the latter-day equivalents of the Milken-era junk-bond evangelists. The mathematical models indicated that there was very little risk, even if common sense said otherwise. The dot-com bubble of the late nineties was, in retrospect, a lesson in what happens when markets defy reasonable metrics or common sense—when the participants mistake a run of speculative good luck for, as Alan Greenspan memorably put it, "a new paradigm." The C.D.O. machine that flourished in the middle of this decade took the tendencies but not the lessons of that period and applied them to the housing market—and thus to the core of our credit system, and our lives. It sucked in ordinary Americans. "Securitization is like fertilizer," Mikhailovich said. "You can grow tomatoes, or blow up buildings."

Mikhailovich believed that you could still invest in C.D.O.s; you just had to do your own work. "Have you ever seen an indenture?" he asked me. I pictured Gordie Howe putting his teeth in a glass for the night. Mikhailovich let a bound sheaf the size of an old stereo receiver drop on the table with a thud. "I'm pretty sure not too many guys read these." It was the C.D.O.'s governing document, detailing what's inside it, and who gets paid (or not paid) when and how—a configuration called "the waterfall." Mikhailovich's maxim was "Know your waterfalls." It was the key to getting the right poultry parts at the right price.

I thought back to something David Beim, at Columbia, had said about securitization: "We built all of these elegant projections. They were good ideas. But they were never designed for bad paper. Having started as a way to make banks safer, they became a machine that said, 'Feed me.'"

And so debt was created to sate the machine. "We've created more assets than there are hands to hold them," Beim said. "And we cannot all de-leverage at the same time."

The banker had come to Barclays, the London-based bank, to help build its investment-banking business in New York. After Lehman went bankrupt, Barclays bought Lehman's North American investment banking business. The Lehman guys started getting rid of the Barclays guys. For the banker, it grated to be supplanted suddenly by the refugees, the ones who, in his reckoning, had destroyed their own firm and with it the global financial system.

After a few weeks, the banker was called in for an interview with his new boss. When he walked in, the new boss was watching a congressional hearing on television. The witness was a Wall Street executive. The new boss held up his hand for a moment, so that he could listen to the executive make a point. The banker, hoping for his new boss's undivided attention, and perhaps an irony-free interview, suggested they reconvene later.

"No, sit down," the new boss said, and then asked, "So what do you do?"

The banker began to explain why he, who had been at Barclays for years, should be employed at his own firm. Before he could finish, the phone rang. It was a personal call, having to do with golf. As the boss talked, the banker watched the executive on TV: tsunami.

When the banker was fired, a few weeks later, his first reaction was relief: it's better to know than to wait. Then came frustration and anger. "Part of my termination agreement is I can't do any harm," the banker said. He had taken to calling his wife "my new best friend." He was trying not to infringe on her routine.

A debate has roughly formed between those who blame the meltdown on the system, rigged up over years and decades, and those who vilify the people who most egregiously exploited the flaws in that system, however substantial those flaws may have been. Both sides may be in agreement that, in the end, human nature is to blame, but the question remains whether, ultimately, our predicament arises out of the venality of the many or of the few. Was it Wall Street in general—or even its clients, and the debt-hungry masses—that behaved abominably, or just a scattering of scoundrels?

Margaret Atwood, in her recent book "Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth," notes that in Aramaic the words for "debt" and "sin" are the same. When we ask for forgiveness from our trespasses or call Christ the Redeemer, we are employing, as she puts it, "the language of debt and pawning or pledging." She goes on, "The whole theology of Christianity rests on the notion of spiritual debts and what must be done to repay them, and how you might get out of paying by having someone else pay instead." (By this standard, America really is a Christian nation.) She adds, "It rests, too, on a long pre-Christian history of scapegoat figures—including human sacrifices—

who take your sins away for you." For the repayment of our debts, we look to the government; the TARP, you might say, is Jesus.

As for expiation, we endeavor to find the worst offenders, whose transgressions can stand in for everyone's. Atwood discusses a medieval character called a Sin Eater, an outcast who took on the sins of the dying and bore them until another Sin Eater—the greater fool—came along to take them off his hands. (If Sin Eaters existed now, someone would securitize them.) So far, Bernie Madoff, John Thain, Dick Fuld, Joseph Cassano, and even Jim Cramer, to name a few who have been cast in the role, have proved insufficient. Their own trespasses aren't nearly broad enough to take on the whole burden of the fraud, avarice, arrogance, and misjudgment that has laid low the world.

There are other candidates and conspiracy theories. One concerns Goldman Sachs and the Treasury's dispensation of bailout funds in the firm's direction. Goldman may be the closest thing we have to an Illuminati. The signs of favoritism, on the part of Henry Paulson, the Treasury Secretary and former Goldman C.E.O. (toward not only Goldman but also Merrill Lynch, run by a former Goldman colleague, and A.I.G., now run by a former Goldman board member), may merely be coincidental, or simply a product of affinity and proximity, rather than a plot, but it is no less infuriating to the taxpayers, to say nothing of the employees of Lehman and Bear Stearns, who watched the government, directly and indirectly, fork over to Goldman (which has continued to claim that it does not need help) sums that might have saved these other firms. But even the most extreme rendering of any alleged skullduggery there, or at A.I.G., or at Lehman, or at Bear Stearns, captures just a portion of the blame.

In my corner-office conversations, the finger often wound up being pointed into space, in the general direction of the natural order. If mistakes were made, not all of them could have been innocent, but few people inside the business seemed to have the stomach for the sorting, as though it might lead to an indictment of free-market capitalism, and of their own happy place inside it. "I had a fiduciary responsibility" can sometimes sound like "I was just following orders." Several people I talked to predicted that there would be show trials but then faltered at the thought of who the defendants could possibly be.

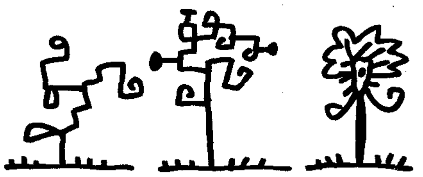
But we try. One afternoon, I went to see Michael Steinhardt, the hedge-fund pioneer who came to prominence in the late sixties, and who shut down his firm in 1995, although he still has an office of people to oversee his own trading and investments. I'd heard that he was on a mission to assign blame. When I arrived at his office, he was flipping through a gardening catalogue while keeping an eye on a trading screen. "Unless the public understands why this happened, until it can identify the villains, you can't recover from it," he said. "If you don't have someone to blame, other than some schmucks with fancy bonuses, you won't have a recovery."

Like many financial titans, Steinhardt favors a catechistic conversational mode, so it was hard to get him to throw out names. My opening propositions were unsatisfying.

"Alan Greenspan? He may have been stupid but not pernicious," Steinhardt said, recalling that Greenspan, in the late sixties, as a consultant, used to make presentations to his firm. "I didn't find him to be anticipatory or perceptive," Steinhardt said.

I brought up Sanford Weill, who built Citigroup into a financial-services giant and incrementally circumvented, and then led the push to repeal, Glass-Steagall. "I was at a party with Sandy Weill," Steinhardt said. "I said, 'Sandy, who are the villains?' He said, 'Huh? I didn't do anything wrong. I just picked the wrong successor.' " Steinhardt smiled.

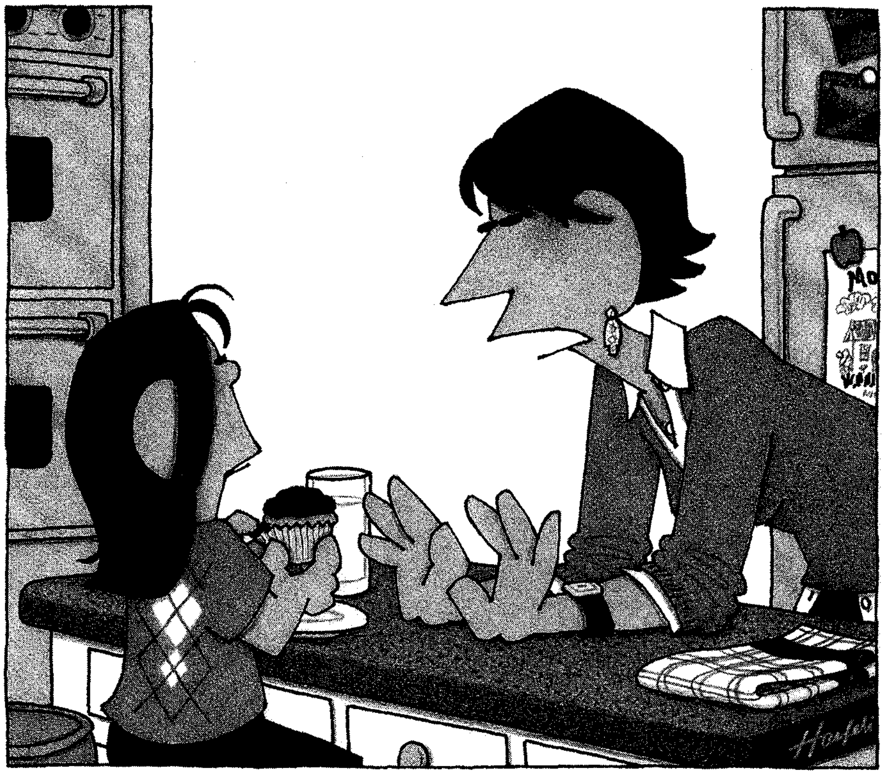
He was quicker to indict the political class. The ignorance of politicians in matters financial is a source of constant contempt on the Street. One discovers that Wall Street is as keen to blame Washington as Washington is to blame Wall Street, which suits them well as co-dependents. Each knows the corruptibility of the other, even if each often seems to misunderstand the other's ways and aims. Each is persuasive.



During the fall and into the spring, I went to see Colin Negrych once a month or so to listen to him talk about macroeconomics, market dynamics, and human frailty. His ruminations became a kind of bass line against which most of the events of these months began to make some kind of sense, or no sense at all. I sat on a couch, opposite his desk, while he kept his eyes mainly on his computer screens, absorbing Bloomberg headlines, messages, and graphs. Sometimes the sound of a clarinet would drift up from the apartment downstairs of a jazz musician, who records for a label that Negrych owns.

Negrych's background is unusual, even if you allow that Wall Street isn't quite as homogeneous as all the blue shirts and fraternity haircuts lead you to suppose. He was reared in Toronto. When he was ten, his mother died of cancer and his father, also ill, moved to a nursing home, and Negrych became a ward of the province. He ran away from his group home and, after some years on the streets, went to work in a nickel mine in northern Manitoba. Back in Toronto a few years later, working as a bouncer at a bar, he met a girl who was heading to New York for college, and he followed her there. He got jobs in restaurants and bars—for a spell, he was on the night shift at Serendipity 3. One weekend, on a visit to a new girlfriend's parents' house, in Connecticut, the family gave him a hard time for not having read "Moby-Dick," and he decided that he'd better go to college. With a high-school equivalency degree, he wandered up to Columbia, where he found himself in the School of General Studies. Negrych resolved to study mathematics.

Like many bright and hungry young men and women of the era, he instead wound up in the training program at Salomon Brothers. He joined the class of 1985, the one that Michael Lewis described in "Liar's Poker." After Salomon, Negrych went to First Boston, where he worked in fixed-income arbitrage with Dexter Senft, who helped invent the mathematics behind mortgage-backed securities. Negrych went on to work, in various capacities—proprietary trading, modelling exotic derivatives—at Lehman Brothers (for less than a day), C.I.B.C., U.B.S., Société Générale (where one of his bosses advised, "The clients are like the geese. We stuff their livers"), and another French bank, called C.C.F. The French eventually tired of him—"I'm what's known as a management challenge"—and so, having made a pile of money, he took some time off. During this period, he patented a screwtop-controlled viscous-material dispenser. In 1997, he joined Barclay and decided to focus on making macroeconomic bets. "You only had to get four trades right a year," he said. Then he got sick. Told by his doctors that he was likely to die, he gave the rest of his money away. But he didn't die. This was good, except that he had no money left. "People never tell you to save for a sunny day," Negrych said.



"Sweetie, words have the power to hurt. I'll teach you some of the most effective ones."

He made an arrangement with Barclay that gave him a share of the money he generates for the firm. It has been lucrative, though unspectacular by the standards of the age. He's made tens of millions since the Nasdaq crash of 2000. He decided, some years ago, that making money for its own sake was no longer interesting, but he loved the markets and felt he had a gift for interpreting them.

In his days at other firms, Negrych had cast himself as an impediment to unsaintliness, "someone to look out for people, not in the sense of helping them get rich in a bull market but in that of preventing them from hurting themselves and others. The sad thing, I realized, is that there was no way to achieve this." He developed a dim view of human behavior in times of prosperity. "I decided to profit from them to the greatest extent possible to give myself the wherewithal to deal with the agony that they would ultimately produce." He decided to be Robin Hood, rather than Mr. Spock.

Negrych belongs to a recondite dispersion of market intellectuals who have an affinity for the ideas of the Austrian school of economics (of von Mises, Schumpeter, Hayek, et al.), such as the axiom, long scorned but now more widely appreciated, that credit booms must necessarily lead to credit busts—that there is such a thing, basically, as gravity. Some, but far from all, of his views may be familiar to readers of economists such as Robert Shiller and the Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman, at least as to the nature of the ailment, although Krugman thinks that the stimulus has been too small, rather than, say, a step on the way to hyperinflation, the blind printing of money. (One investor told me that he had looked into buying the private Swiss company that makes the ink used on dollar bills: "They told me, 'We no sell eet.' ")

Negrych believes that there is a commercial-financial complex, analogous to the military-industrial complex (merchants of debt, rather than of death), which promotes borrowing and spending, and spins indebtedness into fool's gold. You cannot borrow your way out of debt. Printing dollars to prop up failed or failing institutions is a waste of time and money. The government should stick to guaranteeing deposits and regulating the markets properly. It should have let A.I.G., among many others, go bankrupt. The people and the institutions that took foolish risks should be forced to suffer the ill effects. The banks should get back to being "boring"—take deposits, make loans, and give up on financial engineering and speculation. The government should be encouraging its citizens to save, not to lend, borrow, speculate, and shop. The culture has come to favor—even demand, if you consider the middle-class dependence on home equity and 401(k)s and 529s—financial speculation as the cornerstone of a strategy for prosperity, at the urging of the government. People will need to sell stocks to pay off their debts. The "equity culture" is dead. And, finally, this: The current course of "denial and disinformation" will, if not corrected, produce a real depression—the cleansing we need and deserve.

As the weeks went by, Negrych sent me hundreds of e-mails, cantankerously relating bits of news, data, or commentary. The pace of his e-mails accelerated when the market was rallying. He regarded up days as reflections of mass delusion ("Even a few days without bad news quickly leads to the nucleation of assumptions about endless days of good news to follow") or of official intervention; he was not immune to the conspiracy theory, whispered by some non-interventionists, that the government, in the interest of national security, may have established some kind of secret program to buy stocks, to juice the indices. All those late-session comebacks: Negrych smelled a fix. As he wrote me one day, when the global markets seemed to turn on a dime, "Clearly, someone has decided to take a stand right here in the major stock indexes. We'll find out soon what weapon they possess, brick or bazooka."

I happened to go by Negrych's on the day after Bernie Madoff was arrested. A snowstorm gave the Village an anachronistic, muffled Café Wha? air. When I arrived, Negrych, thinking of Madoff, quoted a line from a friend: "Wall Street takes your money and their experience and turns it into their money and your experience."

It wasn't hard to guess what had compelled Madoff's investors to trust him. "The willing suspension of disbelief," Negrych said. It was a high concentrate of what had gripped the financial markets during the boom. "The idea that you can have something for nothing—it's human nip. It's the hereafter, here on earth." Less clear was what had driven Madoff. If it had been money alone, what had he done with it, and why had he not run off with it? Madoff apparently hadn't taken fees, a dubious abnegation. No one on Wall Street forgoes his piece, be it rightful or not. What Madoff craved most of all, Negrych surmised, was prominence, of the kind that can only be bought. "There's an innate tendency among the élite to idolize men who make a lot of money," Negrych said.

Our soaring debt isn't entirely a moral or temperamental failing, a flaw in our national character, or a Wall Street scheme. One afternoon, on a visit to the offices of a money-management firm (view north, overlooking Central Park), I was introduced to a Columbia professor and economist named Bruce Greenwald, who has been called "a guru to Wall Street's gurus." As I began to recite some of what I'd come to believe about America's native appetite for indebtedness, and our struggle now to get free of it, Greenwald cut me off. "De-leveraging is a slogan," he said.

He explained that we are, in some re-

LINES ON THE POET'S TURNING FORTY

I.
And so, at last, I am turning forty,
In just a couple of days.
The big four-oh.
Yes, that is soon to be my age.
(And not fifty-eight. No way. That Wikipedia is a bunch of liars.)
Nope, not any other age, just forty.
What other age could someone born in 1969 (and not 1951)
Possibly be?
(And please do *not* listen to my ex-wife, that sad, bitter woman in her late fifties.)
What does it feel like, old bones?
Yes, I have lost a step or two in the hundred-metre dash.
I accept these changes.
But if a guy says in a published poem that he is forty,
As I am doing here,
It's obvious that must be the age that he is,
Officially.

II.
Cattail down blows from the swamp like smoke,
Ice bares its teeth on the surface of the mud puddles.
It is fall—but not for me in any metaphorical sense,
Because forty, while not technically all that young, is hardly like "the autumn of life" or anything;
And also because Natalie Portman, the famous actress,
Is in love with me. And why not?
After all, there is not that much difference, age-wise,
Between a person who I guess is in her mid-to-late twenties
And a person who is only just turning forty,
I.e., me.

III.
You walk across the room carrying a bouquet of phlox in your hand
("You" being Natalie Portman, the famous actress)
As a present for me on my upcoming fortieth birthday.
Come sit beside me, my dear,
And I will tell you about my previous thirty-nine,
Except for the year when I was in sixth grade,
Which is a total blank.
I do remember fifth grade, when we had Mrs. Erwin,
And seventh grade, when we moved to the new junior-high building;
But when I try to remember sixth—nothing.
Let us not mourn what is lost.
Sixth grade was probably not that great.
Now, and on into the serious years that lie ahead,
You and I will have each other.

IV.
An alert reader may point out
That we did not move to the new junior-high building during the 1981-82 school year
(As would fit with my being in seventh grade and having been born in 1969)

But eighteen years earlier, in the school year of 1963-64.
This is baloney!
Whoever says such statements is wrong.
I think that when it comes to the details of my own life
My own word should be trusted over that of some random
reader,
Thank you!

V.
Unfortunately, because of this business
About when we did or didn't move to the new junior-high building,
Natalie Portman's suspicions somehow were raised,
And she had a completely unnecessary "background check" run on me,
And then left me for Shia LaBeouf,
Who is hot right now.

VI.
This poem is becoming a disaster.
It happens sometimes—
I get into a poem, and the thing goes haywire,
And I don't know how to get out.
According to some nitpicker at the Ohio Department of
Education,
Mrs. Roberta Erwin retired and left teaching entirely in 1967,
Two years before my birth.
Thus, the argument goes,
She could not have taught me fifth grade,
As I claimed in Canto III.

VII.
Look, I am turning forty, all right?
Let's just leave it at that.
Critics and people in the media who would ruin a celebration
with this kind of "gotcha" behavior make me sick.
If you still doubt me,
Please be assured that this magazine has a rigorous policy
of fact checking,
And all the information in this poem has been checked,
And directly verified with me.

VIII.
Well, it's going to be great being forty.
I am looking forward to it.
There are plenty of other beautiful actresses around;
I may also try out for the forty-and-over division
On the National Professional Rodeo Association tour.
Recently someone asked me if I remembered when the name
Of Idlewild Airport in New York City
Was changed to J.F.K. International.
"Of course not," I replied.
"That was long before my time.
Back then I had not even been born."

—*Ian Frazier*

spects, the victims of a structural imperative reaching back to the waning days of the Second World War. The Great Depression in Britain, he said, started in the late nineteen-twenties, owing to structural deficits in the nation's balance of payments, a result of the pound sterling's traditional role as the world's reserve currency. Bretton Woods, the global economic conference in New Hampshire in 1944, replaced the pound with the dollar.

This meant that debts tended to be denominated in dollars, and other nations had to hold dollars in reserve, to pay them off. Not having dollars would expose your country to the risks of currency fluctuations. And so other countries coveted dollars. To get them, they sold goods. There was, therefore, in the Bretton Woods arrangement, a structural demand for current-account surpluses, and for someone to eat up all those surpluses. We had to be the consumer of last resort. "We've been living beyond our means for the sake of the world," Greenwald told me. "Where else would all that crap go?"

Barclay Leib, a derivatives trader and hedge-fund consultant, told me that some years ago his son, who was five at the time, asked him what his job was. Leib thought about it for a moment, and then pointed down the street. "You see that Toyota? Well, we pay the Japanese twenty-five thousand dollars for it. Daddy's job is to get the money back." As he told me, "The Japanese invest it here and make mistakes." He added, "Mrs. Watanabe was then and still is groping for yield."

They make, we take. And then we find ways to pay for it all. Our prime asset, over time, became our financial acumen. It represented an ever greater part of our economy, our political system, and our interaction with the world. "What's our best export?" Leib said. "Scrap metal? No. Hedge-fund managers. Financial creativity. We're good at it. We keep the cycle of money going."

This flawed arrangement may be nearing its breaking point, thanks to our reckless spending, expanding debt, and increasingly questionable creditworthiness. A few recent Treasury auctions went poorly, and China has floated the idea of an alternative global currency.

I recently revisited Morris Bishop's

"I said come alone."

• •

concise history of medieval Europe, which begins with a winsome rejection of the "unfortunate term" that gives the book its title, "The Middle Ages." Bishop observes that the people of the period "did not know that they were living in the middle; they thought, quite rightly, that they were time's latest achievement." The Middle Ages began with the fall of Rome. "Whatever the cause, the later days of the empire were marked by discouragement and fear, by what has been well termed 'a failure of nerve.' The Roman Empire was like a declining business, whose program is retrenchment and retreat, whose ventures are desperate, whose employees can only shrug their shoulders and hope that the old enterprise will last out their time."

The salesman was an English major without an M.B.A., a burner of both candle ends, who, in his mid-twenties, submitted to the lure of Wall Street. He rose quickly; he was bright and personable, competitive and cocksure. After a few years, he settled in at one of the big firms, where he helped develop a profitable line in equities. In 2003, he used an offer from Merrill Lynch to dramatically increase his pay. Not long afterward, Merrill offered to raise it again. It was hard to resist. A high-ranking Merrill executive invited him to breakfast at the Ritz Carlton in Battery Park City, where Merrill was based. The executive was seated in the middle of the restaurant, waiting at a table for two. He didn't stand to greet the salesman or, when he indicated that it was time for the salesman to go, to see him off. As the salesman was walking out, he saw the waitstaff reset his half of the table and usher in another prospect. He realized that he was just one unit in a robo-hiring spree. Merrill was ramping up.

The salesman's boss at his old firm was a trader who in matters of personal finance preached extreme risk aversion. At bonus time, he'd tell the salesman, "I'm not going to pay you unless you promise to sell your stock [in the firm] as soon as you can and buy munis," meaning municipal bonds. When the salesman told him about Merrill's latest offer, the boss said, "Go. Take the money. The guy's an idiot. He's paying you too much. Either they're really stupid or they have so much money it doesn't matter." Being the former, they mistook themselves for the latter.

People who have worked on or near a trading desk tend to refer to any decision, any commitment, any choice in life, as a trade. "I did the trade for money, so I deserve what I got," the salesman recalled recently. What he got was a window on the end.

Once Lehman Brothers went under, it became clear that Merrill, too, was in deep distress. Its chief executive, John Thain, sold the firm, in order to save it. The buyer was Bank of America, a giant bank based in North Carolina that aspired to Wall Street dominance. As the fall wore on, and the economy soured, and the share prices of banks and brokerages, including Merrill's supposed white knight, collapsed, the salesman and his colleagues began to realize that this was not likely to end well. They consoled themselves by cheering Lehman's demise, out of Schadenfreude and superstition that its death might appease the gods. Then a guy on the desk did a spreadsheet analysis of the firms' relative predicaments, and they all realized that the Lehman guys still had jobs, while the Merrill guys were about to lose theirs, and their stock price was fast approaching zero. It was Schadenfreude's revenge. As luck would have it, the salesman had shorted Lehman—he was forbidden from shorting his own stock—and invested the proceeds in a hedge fund. But then the hedge fund got clobbered.

By Christmas, the salesman and his colleagues had become zombies. There was less and less work to be done, and little sense in currying favor. Some guys were going to the gym twice a day. The salesman occasionally snuck out to the Regal Battery Park 11, the movie theatre across the street from the firm's headquarters. He saw "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" and "Gran Torino" and "Slumdog Millionaire."

The firings accelerated. There was a tradition on the trading floor at Merrill to stand and applaud colleagues who had been fired—or RIFfed. (RIF stands for Reduction in Force.) After a while, these impromptu tributes were breaking out several times an hour, State of the Union-like, and the ovations grew queasy and halfhearted.

The salesman's boss was jittery, but he urged his charges to hang on and hope. The salesman thought of "The Trial," when Josef K., on the verge of execution, has a self-generated fantasy of rescue—"Who was it? A friend? A good man? Someone who sympathized?" The boss quickly veered from denial to abject self-pity, and began pestering the salesman for scuttlebutt and support: "What are they saying about me on the floor?" The boss, called in by his bosses to discuss which of his charges he'd fire, had picked up on chatter that he'd go down himself, which would mean death for the salesman. The boss came out of the meeting visibly distraught. "What am I going to do?" he moaned. "I'm going to have to move to Minneapolis. What's my wife going to say?" The salesman thought of "Richard II": "My large kingdom for a little grave, a little little grave, an obscure grave; For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings." He grabbed his boss by the shoulders and told him to get control of himself, thinking, Behold, the world's unhappiest millionaire. As he comforted the boss, he overheard his secretary lamenting the monthly commuter-bus pass she'd just bought; if she were fired, too, that cost was sunk. He was ashamed.

Diminished pay and government oversight had rendered the miseries and indignities of investment banking no longer endurable; it was hard enough to will himself to do it when he was making millions. For a couple of hundred thousand, forget it. His stock was worthless; the work had dried up; the firm had degenerated into a job-preservation free-for-all; and he and his peers were being depicted everywhere as crooks and thieves.

On the day that the salesman was fired, he came home, prepared to finesse a conversation with his children, but his six-year-old daughter had overheard her mother talking with a friend on the phone, and so, when he walked in, she announced to a playmate, "Daddy's coming home today because he got fired and his firm is going bankrupt."

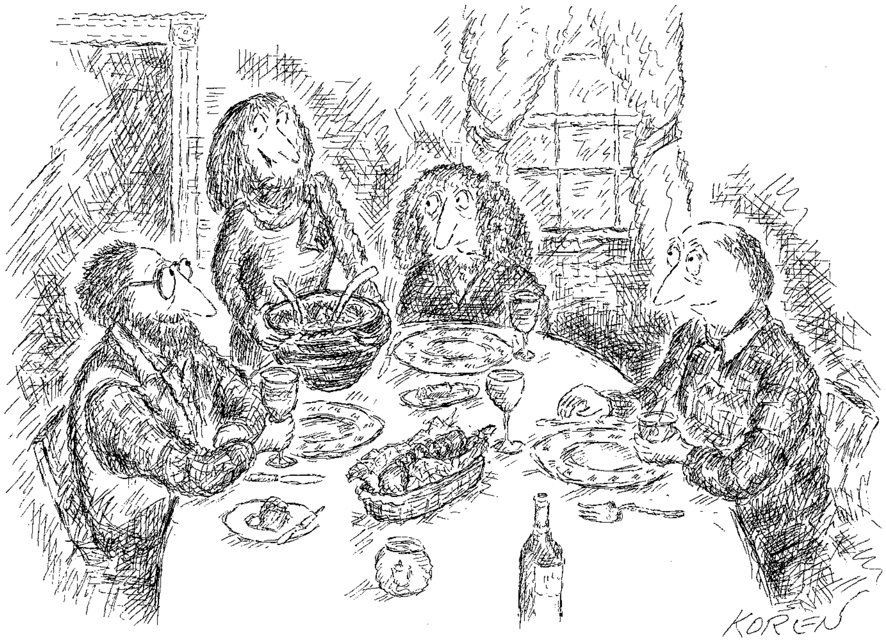
The most frequent responses were "Let me know if there's anything I can do" and "I don't know what to say." This last one annoyed him, because of the way it seemed to conflate joblessness with death or disease. He said he felt liberated, but the old question of where do you see yourself in five years left him stumped. There was a part of him that wanted to move to Brooklyn or to another state—he could be a teacher and a coach. His wife preferred that he get an interview at Goldman Sachs. He tried to persuade her to put their apartment on the market, if only to gauge its value, and then learned that there were six others for sale in the building. He had missed the trade.

Michael Cembalest, the chief investment officer at J. P. Morgan, writes a weekly memo, called "Eye on the Market," which the firm sends its clients. Usually, Cembalest discusses various investment and market issues, but one morning in February, before getting on to the "really terrible economic news of the week" (home prices, consumer confidence, layoffs, earnings—down, down, up, down), he discussed what he called the Conversation, a term he'd learned from a client.

The Conversation can take place between a husband and a wife, or a parent and a child. Its subject is affordability; its only requirement is honesty, and rudimentary math. In some cases, the Conversation, or the underlying reality, can lead to estrangement or divorce; an absence of money will expose differences in values and taste.

In his memo, Cembalest enumerated, as a guide to his clients, his own household expenses, which, relatively speaking, were modest. He divided them into the categories "mandatory" (mortgage, taxes, transportation), "discretionary" (distilled spirits, gym memberships), and "frivolous" (electronics, jewelry, art work). He concluded, "Like the federal government, mandatory spending made up seventy per cent of our total. So to make an impact, we decided to reduce discretionary spending by fifty per cent and frivolous spending by eighty-five per cent." (He later emphasized to me that he and his wife made these decisions together.) Cheaper booze ("non-brand name spirits are half the price"), cheaper jewelry ("this year I bought a 'Reef Fish Identification Guide' for my wife's birthday"). He advised that "a numerically based discussion was more productive than a rhetorical one."

These numbers do not lie or flatter. Up and down the line, obligations loom and prospects dim. Wall Street's tribulations have brought drastically straitened circumstances to nearly every profession. Whether you work for a contractor, a vender, a hospital, a restau-



"Tell them that hilarious story about your colonoscopy."

rant, a transit system, a high school, a newspaper, a charity, or yourself, the Conversation likely involves a new and irreconcilable calculation of commitments: perhaps even an abandonment of a college education or the loss of a health-care plan.

As for the co-op classes, the Wall Street set, it can seem that the loss they fear most is the loss of face. No one seems to want anyone else to know. In one sense, there is less shame in failure now, because it is widespread and undiscerning. Still, it smarts. There are successful circles in which success (to say nothing of money) isn't everything, but without it you'd better bring something else. Charm, wit, talent, kindness, and generosity certainly help, but only if they complement characteristics that could be more readily converted into social or professional capital. Without the fancy job or the big nut, it gets harder to hang around.

Economists like to draw lessons from Japan's lost decade—to see in its example of zombie banks, futile half-measures, mass denial, and a moribund Nikkei a primer in how denial doesn't pay. But human nature holds sway, down even at the level of the neighborhood. In Japan, during the long stagnation, men who had lost their jobs but couldn't face the shame of telling their neighbors would dress for work and then spend the day in the library or the park. Around here, the social pressures are more subtle; men are not afraid to appear at private-school pickup, in jeans, although they often make a show of maintaining BlackBerry vigilance. See them at soccer practice, pacing the sidelines, gesticulating into their earpieces. Confidence is essential to job-seeking.

Already the value of their skill set is in steep decline. There will be fewer seats at the table. That means that a lot of college-educated well-off white-collar professionals will have to find something else to do. People will have to work harder for less. Some Wall Street exiles find themselves interviewing for jobs that pay one-eighth as much as their old one. When your self-worth is based on your salary—a correlation as well observed as it is widely denied—it's hard to adjust to being 12.5 per cent of the man you used to be.

"I'm running late—some people were waiting for my table so I had to take my sweet time."

It has been fashionable in recent years to use the terms alpha and beta, which in investing refer, respectively, to absolute performance and relative performance, in ordinary conversation (as in, "We always give the beta"). Well, beta-wise, things look a little better, in the self-evaluation department. Whether we're talking nations (the United States economy is a disaster, but others are even worse) or neighbors, beta is the more reassuring approach these days, and is what allowed people to say, this winter, "Down thirty is the new flat." Alpha-wise, however, the wreckage is widespread. John Maynard Keynes had this to say about the appropriate temperament: "A 'sound' banker, alas! is not one who foresees danger and avoids it, but one who, when he is ruined, is ruined in a conventional and orthodox way along with his fellows, so that no one can really blame him."

By spring, the conventional wisdom had quickened. Self-preservation masqueraded as common sense. In the wranglings over solutions, members of the political establishment sought tactical advantage, and yoked popular opinion to their career calculations, drumming up outrage when it suited them (A.I.G., Chrysler) and then ignoring it when it did not. The asset-owner class conjured whatever conviction it could to protect the remaining value of its decimated investments. Both sought, by all means necessary, to reflate risk-asset prices—houses, stocks—as though the low prices were the disease itself, rather than a symptom. Above all, they promoted confidence.

The wires were rife with attempts to bury the bad and turn up the good. Regulators were softening the widely resented mark-to-market accounting provisions that had, in effect, compelled banks to acknowledge, rather than obfuscate, how toxic their toxic assets might be. When Secretary Timothy Geithner announced the details of the Treasury's plan for financing the private sector's purchase of toxic assets from the banks, the Dow rose more than four hundred points. The warm reception suggested flawed conception; Wall Street liked the plan because it was generous to Wall Street. That it might also be a transfer of wealth from future taxpayers to incompetent or opportunistic financiers—an extreme instance of privatizing gains and socializing losses—did not trouble the equity markets, which generally don't fret much over fairness.

One afternoon not long ago, I asked Colin Negrych if there had been any capitulation, among market participants and ordinary citizens, to what he and other dour prophets continued to describe as a catastrophe of epochal proportions. "No," he said. "People are still inclined to view this as a temporary disruption." Even peers who were predicting dire outcomes didn't seem to believe that they would come to pass. Decades of experience had taught them to buy on the dips. "People are clinging to the idea that there is some 'they' out there that can reverse this, that the Fed will arrest and reverse this," he said. "Having this thing normalize is the worst nightmare for the powers that be.

"The bear market is integrity," Negrych went on. "It's honesty, transparency, and common sense." This was as much a moral declaration as a mathematical one. Truth in accounting—the proper recognition of losses and liabilities, the acknowledgment of inconvenient facts—is a kind of virtue. Credit relies on a foundation of trust, which comes of honesty and fair dealing. The bull market, we've learned, did away with these things. Enthusiasm, in the presence of lucre, tends toward rapacity.

It became hard to argue. People kept sending me grim research reports from investment firms—the financial world's equivalent of viral YouTube links. One of them, from Bridgewater Associates, spent ten dense pages enumerating the conditions common to depressions, and then declared, "That, in a nutshell, is our template." Nutshells, these days, are the size of swimming pools.

In spite of such tidings, the stock-market rally held. Optimism sprouted. How was one to reconcile the dismal fundamentals and statistics, and the private pessimism, with the assertions by the banks, the Feds, and the media that deliverance might be at hand? Houses were starting to sell in Sacramento. The rise in unemployment was slowing. The banks, for the most part, had passed their stress tests, albeit with gentlemen's C's. (There was also a matter of seventy-five billion dollars.) *Women's Wear Daily* put smiley faces on its front page. The salesman had found another Wall Street job. Might the paper that we'd laid over the abyss be sturdy enough to convey us across?

The market scolds saw the positive signs as jabberwocky, or else mere accounting tricks. (Goldman Sachs, for example, had, as part of its conversion into a bank holding company, changed its fiscal year, so that its results for December, a gruesome month, vanished from its earnings calculation. Abracadabra.) The skeptics worried that the crisis was mutating into a virulent strain of delusion, a pretext for the preservation of the old status quo. The presumption was that staving off near-term pain would lead to ever more spectacular collapse. But who knows? Maybe it won't. Divination is fraught, facts being merely what we make of them.

Another morning in the sky, another corner office—a view south and east. The occupant was a financier at a prominent private-equity firm. He was drinking herbal tea, feeling worn down. The office was large and typical—caricatures and tombstones commemorating old deals, a computer screen filled with figures more red than green. When I asked him about the price of a particular stock, he gave me a sickly look and said, "You're still in equities?"

Personally, he'd been short the market for two years. The trendy trade, and the one he was fond of, was ticker TBT, a way of shorting the twenty-year Treasury, in anticipation of inflation. ("There is nothing as inflationary as the whiff of deflation," one fund manager told me.)

The issue of the day and the week and the season was the insolvency of the banking system. "When you are leveraged twenty-five to one, if your assets fall by five per cent, you are technically insolvent," he said. "The increase in leverage worked because, like a Ponzi scheme, it was ramping up the value of the assets that it was financing. That all worked, until it didn't."

It was time for a conference call with a hedge-fund manager who was particularly pessimistic, and had correctly called the subprime meltdown. "This guy is doom, doom, doom," the financier said. A succession of voices came out of the speakerphone device. The financier greeted everyone, and then pressed mute and began to wander around his office, as the hedge-fund manager laid out the familiar gloomy statistics: trillions of dollars of excess debt, not enough money in the world to soak it up.

"We all know how we got here. Let's talk about what's going to happen," he said. "Prices of all assets will decline, regardless of the stimulus." The silver lining, if you could call it one, was that the rest of the world was in worse shape. The financier occasionally nodded. He said to me that he expected the European Union to fall apart, and with it the euro. A voice on the speakerphone said that Swedish banks were struggling—bad loans in Latvia. The United States was using currency-swap lines to inject capital into other countries' ailing banks. "We're not only propping up our own mediocrity," the voice said. "We're doing it with the whole world. And as fiduciaries we can't invest in a market that's propped up."

"Mad Max time, baby," the financier said, before double-checking that the mute button was indeed on.

The voice went on, "If the long bond starts rising, we're done. That's the Armageddon scenario." Someone mentioned a jobless rate of up to twenty per cent. "How awful is that going to be?" one voice said. There ensued talk of riots in China and Greece, and the relative merits of gold and canned food.

There was no anxiety or even amazement in their voices, just a kind of war-room self-satisfaction. A voice said, "Capitalism without bankruptcy is like Christianity without Hell."

The financier had heard enough. He was eager for some air. Without signing off, he grabbed his coat and walked out. The streets were busy; nothing seemed amiss. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
An audio interview with Nick Paumgarten.

THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

DRINK UP

The rise of really cheap wine.

BY DANA GOODYEAR

Not long ago, Fred Franzia celebrated the sale of the four-hundred-millionth bottle of Charles Shaw, a wine that costs $1.99 at Trader Joe's and is known by the chummy nickname Two Buck Chuck. "Take that and shove it, Napa," he said. "Four hundred million and climbing." Franzia owns forty thousand acres of vineyards, more than anyone in the country; he crushes three hundred and fifty thousand tons of grapes a year, more, he figures, than anyone but his cousin Joseph Gallo, at E. & J. Gallo Winery; and his company, Bronco, has annual revenues of more than five hundred million dollars. Franzia's objective is to sell as much wine as possible—he sells twenty million cases a year now, which makes Bronco the fourth-largest winery in the United States, and would like to reach a hundred million—and his strategy is to charge next to nothing for it. He believes that no bottle of wine should cost more than ten dollars. Jim Carter, a salesman who represents Bronco's products overseas, says that at these prices the competition for wine is bottled water.

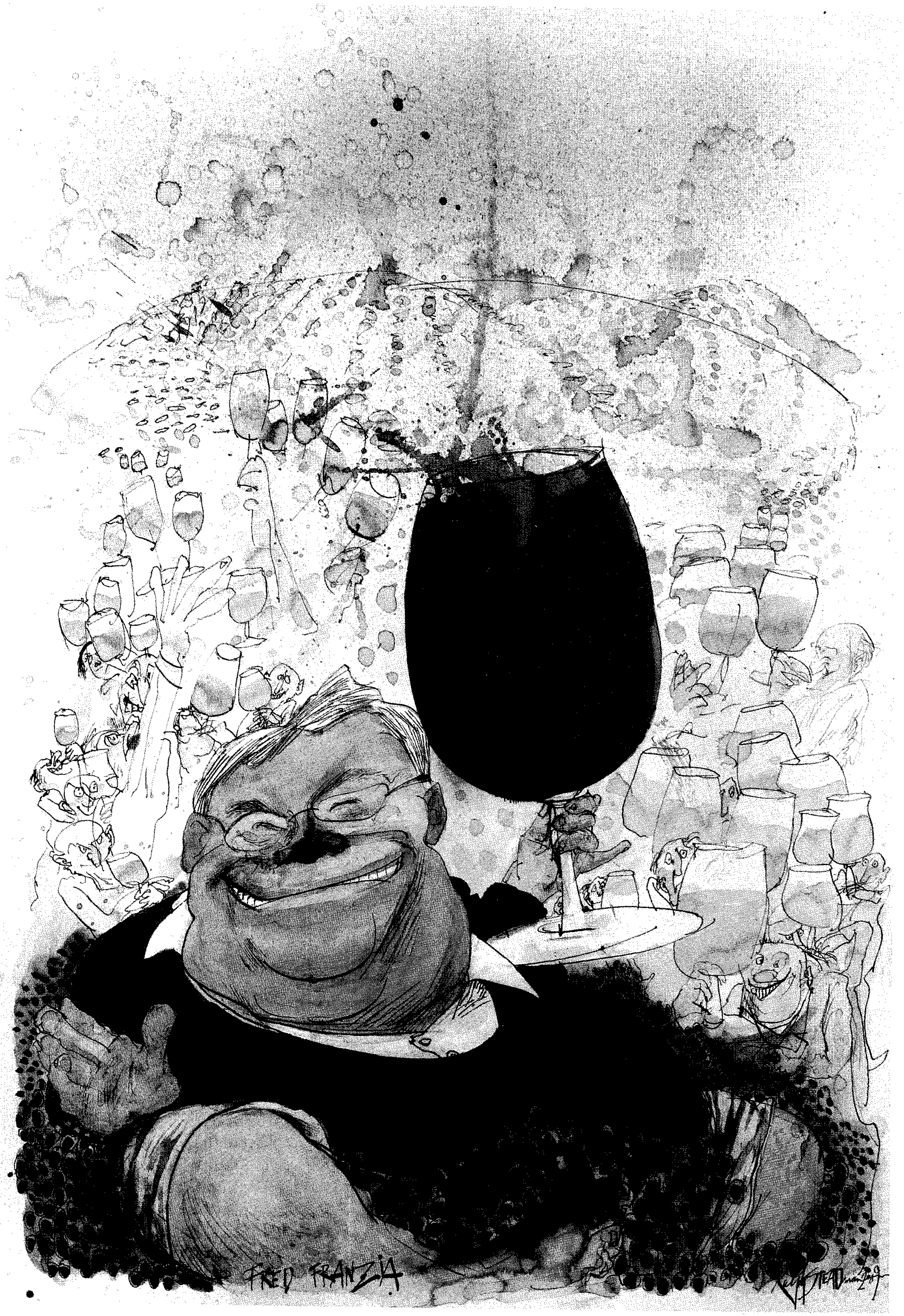
Franzia is sixty-five and twice divorced, with silver hair and a smile that steals wickedly across his face. He is not tall, and he is heavy, despite having lost sixty pounds in three months last year. (He has cut out fried food and tries to limit himself to two glasses of wine a night.) His shape is squarish, like a gourmet marshmallow. The way he rolls his eyes, tracing an elaborate, hundred-and-eighty-degree arc, is almost camp. Every several minutes, and sometimes as often as a hundred times a day, Franzia picks up the phone in his office, puts it on speaker, and tells one of his employees to bring him some of his "witch's brew" (instant chicken broth that he drinks to fill himself up), or deliver him his latest stack of mail ("What's this, more money?" he'll say, when the employee hands it over), or get someone on the phone for him to bullshit with. By this he means do business. If the person he seeks—say, his assistant, Barbara, who's been with Bronco since its founding, in 1973, or Anya, the pretty young Russian in accounting he has his eye on and refers to as Mrs. Brain—is not at her desk, he looks momentarily helpless and is likely to mutter, under his breath, "Oh, God damn these women." Then he calls again.

The Bronco operation is vast and complex, and involves nearly every aspect of the wine business. Franzia is both a major seller and a major buyer on the bulk market. He owns several wineries, including one in Sonoma, where he bottles eighteen thousand cases a day, and he acts as a custom winemaker for wineries without his capacity. In 2000, he opened a ninety-two-thousand-square-foot bottling plant in a business park near the Napa airport. With three high-speed lines—one dedicated to Charles Shaw—the plant can bottle twice the amount of the entire Napa Valley. Much of the wine Franzia bottles there is "freeway aged"—it comes up from the Central Valley in tankers and is packaged for quick sale. Although Charles Shaw wine falls under the generic California appellation, the broadest possible designation, it can legitimately be labelled "Cellared & Bottled by Charles Shaw Winery, Napa, CA," a practice that strikes many in Napa as unsavory. "It's called a Zip Code winery," Vic Motto, a business adviser to Napa Valley wineries, says. "The unsuspecting consumer may not realize it's not Napa wine. Fred uses that to his advantage." Franzia says that he built the plant in Napa because that's where so many of the wineries he does business with are based.

Talking about his wine, Franzia can sound like an old-fashioned Democratic populist, though personally he's more of a Darwinian capitalist. "You tell me why someone's bottle is worth eighty dollars and mine's worth two dollars," he says. "Do you get forty times the pleasure from it?" With Charles Shaw, which Bronco introduced in 2002, Franzia invented a category, known as "super-value"—wine that costs less than three dollars a bottle—that is now a significant segment of the marketplace.

Cheap wine—so-called skid-row wine—is nothing new; Franzia's idea was to make cheap wine that yuppies would feel comfortable drinking. He put Charles Shaw in a seven-hundred-and-fifty-millilitre glass bottle, with a real cork, and used varietal grapes—Cabernet, Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio, and Chardonnay, among others. One way that Franzia keeps the price so low is by acting as his own distributor in California. (Elsewhere, he has to go through a third-party wholesaler, which makes Two Buck Chuck cost roughly $2.99 a bottle.) Another efficiency is the enormous size of the wine lots he buys on the bulk market to put into the Charles Shaw brands. Bronco has an elaborate quality-control system—a high-tech laboratory with mass spectrometers that test for sulfur compounds and yeast byproducts in parts-per-billion measurements—but, partly because of the diverse sources of the wine, absolute consistency is impossible. "It's a moving target," Karen MacNeil, a prominent Napa-based wine writer and educator, told me. Charles Shaw Cabernet, which she had tried on a couple of occasions, had left her unimpressed. "I thought, What's the fuss? This is merely a cheap wine," she said. "I don't understand how people put this in their mouths." James

Speaking of the San Joaquin Valley and Napa, Fred Franzia says, "We are who we are. They want to pretend they're royalty."


FRED FRANZIA

RALPH STEADMAN

Laube, a senior editor at *Wine Spectator* and the chief California wine critic for the magazine, gave the 2004 Charles Shaw Merlot an underwhelming 77 points, writing that it was "on the medicinal side of herbal, with thin weedy flavors that give the fruit notes a sourness." The 2005 sauvignon blanc he pronounced "quaffable." But the 2005 Chardonnay, which went on to win a double gold medal at the 2007 California state fair, he described as "clean and intense, with ripe, vivid citrus and pear flavors that end with a refreshing lemony edge." Still, there are some in the Napa Valley who refuse to call Charles Shaw by its cute nickname. To them, it's Two Buck Upchuck.

The recession is likely to bring Franzia more customers. People are drinking more, and cheaper, wine; industry people call it "trading down," a sharp reversal after decades of aspirational consumption. From his own vineyards, Franzia has a ready supply to meet the increasing demand. In good times and bad, owning so many acres allows him to experiment with up-and-coming varietals, changing the character of his vines by grafting new shoots onto old root stock. "We feed the shortages," he says. For instance, after the movie "Sideways" created a boom in Pinot Noir, he converted thousands of acres of vineyards, through grafting, to Pinot Noir. "Every year, the vineyards get refreshed," he told me, explaining that this year he is grafting two thousand acres, or five per cent of his holdings—not much risk, should his bets prove to be losers. "The average farmer would shit in his pants. We're just adjusting to the market." Another time, he said, "I've got twenty-four million grapevines. My vines alone have a three-hundred-and-sixty-million-dollar value, not counting the land. That's why no one can catch us. Checkmate, we won."

Bronco's headquarters, which sit behind a phalanx of shadowy Italian cypresses, past a secure checkpoint, are in Ceres, an agricultural town on the outskirts of Modesto, in the Central Valley—a term that Franzia finds derogatory, as it fails to acknowledge the geological diversity contained within the valley. (His part of the valley, he points out, is the San Joaquin.) It also irritates Franzia when people describe Bronco's facility, with its four hundred and fifty-two stainless-steel storage tanks—including six liquid-oxygen tanks that once held fuel for intercontinental ballistic missiles and are now used to make champagne—as being reminiscent of an oil refinery. The place projects the aura of a faintly hostile sovereign state. Out front, there are three flagpoles. One flies company colors, a maroon-and-gold flag that says "JFJ," with the "J"s standing for Franzia's partners, Joseph and John, who are Fred's older brother and a cousin. The others fly the flag of the home state or country of any visitor, and the American flag. "No California flag—they've screwed us too many times," Franzia says. "We shouldn't fly the U.S. flag, the bastards. They have a felony on us."

"Have you ever tried buying lots of stuff?"

In 1994, Franzia pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud with Bronco by falsely labelling grapes. He paid a five-hundred-thousand-dollar fine; the company pleaded no contest and paid a two-and-a-half-million-dollar fine. According to the grand-jury indictment, during the late eighties and early nineties Franzia and Bronco misrepresented about a million gallons of wine worth some five million dollars on the bulk market. Franzia was said to have instructed that Zinfandel leaves be scattered over less expensive grapes, a practice that he allegedly referred to by the Whitmanesque euphemism the "blessing of the loads." The judge ordered Franzia to step down from Bronco's board of directors and to relinquish his position as company president for five years; he became the chief financial officer instead. (Today, he is chairman and C.E.O., and Joseph and John are co-presidents.) "It didn't matter," Franzia told me. "The chairs didn't move." As part of his plea, he agreed to perform five hundred hours of community service, which he did at a child-abuse-prevention center in Modesto, under the alias Ralph Kramden, from "The Honeymooners." Before George W. Bush left office, Franzia petitioned him for pardon, and was turned down.

Bronco's offices consist of several

large construction trailers that were hauled onto the lot thirty years ago and never improved upon. The walls of the conference room, a drafty connector linking Fred's office to John's, are lined with shelves containing wine bottles, examples of the scores of labels that Bronco has on the market at any given time: Forest Glen, Salmon Creek, Quail Ridge, Crane Lake. The brands, like the names of subdivisions, invoke an invented or, in some cases, an obliterated past: Franzia frequently buys labels and trademarks out of bankruptcy—saving himself the cost of development—and repurposes them when he sees an opening in the market. Usually, he doesn't bother to change the packaging or design—just the wine inside and, of course, the price. (At the moment, he has some twenty brands waiting to be deployed.) Controlling an array of brands allows him to be flexible, opportunistically exploiting supplies of certain varietals as they become available, and temporarily discontinuing a brand should the price of its component wine get too high. Tony Cartlidge, who owns a midsized winery in the Napa Valley and has done business with Franzia over the years, finds the bottles on the shelf unnerving, a kind of warning of the possible future awaiting the vintner who can't make his business thrive. "They're like ghouls staring down at you," he told me.

"The strings are catgut."

Several weeks ago, Franzia sat with Jim Carter, the Bronco salesman, in the conference room after lunch. He asked the receptionist to send in his next appointment—a slim man with thinning hair and skittery blue eyes who introduced himself as a wine entrepreneur. "What's our main purpose today?" Franzia asked, shaking his hand.

"I want to partner with you to defeat Gallo and Red Bicyclette." (Red Bicyclette is a popular French wine distributed by Gallo, in the eight-to-ten-dollar range.)

"How do you pronounce that?" Franzia asked mockingly.

"Bee-cee-*clette*?"

"Are you French?"

The man explained that his product was aimed at professional women who buy wine at the grocery store but are embarrassed to show up at a dinner party with Arrogant Frog or Fat Bastard. Franzia, meanwhile, sorted through a tall stack of documents that Barbara had placed next to the phone. The man talked about his wife and daughter, and said he had studied at Berkeley. "I want to participate in the growth of the brand," he said. "I'm happy to give up equity—"

Franzia looked up to interrupt him. "If we do anything, we own at least fifty per cent. Get that clear in your head. That trademark will be jointly owned. If it runs, it runs. If it doesn't, we talk about it." He returned to the mail, scrawling notes with a dull pencil across some pages, and dramatically tearing in half those he didn't need: C.E.O. performance art. Finally, he seemed to notice his visitor again. "O.K., we're not going to issue camping rights," he said. "You gotta get the hell out of here." He promised the man an answer in two weeks.

"Did you think that guy was gay?" Franzia asked Carter as soon as the door closed. (Scared, Carter said.) I asked if anything had impressed him about the man's business plan. "No," he said. "What we'll do is offer him fifty thousand dollars for his packaging and label. It'll sit there and stew."

Carter made a move to go. "You leaving?" Franzia asked. From the shelf, he pulled down a carafe of California Winery, a brand with a palm tree and a Mission bell tower on the label. (He sells a million bottles of it a year to Tex-Mex restaurants in France.) "Say goodbye to Dennis." The carafe was full of ashes. "Dennis was Jim's predecessor, and he designed the package," Franzia explained to me. He went on to praise Dennis's loyalty, of which the decision to bequeath his own bodily remains was the highest expression. He patted the carafe. "Once I get to six, I gotta get a cemetery license," he said.

Just then, a Bronco winemaker poked his head in and said that he had samples from Kirkland Ranch, a large Napa Valley winery that was in bankruptcy proceedings. "They're just bitin' the dust, one by one," Franzia said. "Two hundred and fifty thousand for the trademarks and the labels. Boom, we strike. Clean it right out. We can buy their bulk wine for two dollars a gallon, and put it in the red-wine tank. We're in tough economic conditions. The strong will survive and the dumb ones will die."

He pushed a Mason jar of Jolly Ranchers across the table, and entreated me to have one. “Someone gave those to me,” he said. “They could be poisonous. I want to see if you fall.”

The Central Valley, where Franzia grew up, is a huge expanse of rich farmland between the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Range, four hundred miles north to south. At fifteen thousand dollars an acre, land is cheap. The weather is sunny and hot, and the soil is extremely fertile: grape harvests can be as high as twelve tons an acre. But among wine connoisseurs, who believe “marginal situations” to be the best for viticulture, this is not considered a virtue. The Napa Valley, which has rocky, volcanic soil, coastal fogs, and cold nights, yields about four tons an acre, and is some of the most expensive agricultural land in the world. (In 2002, Francis Ford Coppola bought a vineyard there for nearly three hundred and fifty thousand dollars an acre.) “In the Central Valley, grapes grow as if they’re on steroids,” one Napa wine expert told me disapprovingly. “The grapes ripen too quickly. The conditions are suitable for beverage wine as opposed to fine wine.”

In the nineteen-sixties, the winemaker Robert Mondavi began to develop and promote the Napa Valley as a fine-wine-growing region comparable to the best areas in France. Today, Napa is the most prominent wine region in California—indeed, in the United States—although it produces only about four per cent of the state’s volume. (The Central Valley accounts for seventy-five per cent.) The common values, and buzzwords, are “artisanal,” “hand-crafted,” and “site-specific.” The wines are correspondingly expensive, commanding up to ten times the price of Central Valley wines on the bulk market.

Franzia likes to point out that the Mondavis—“the original carpetbaggers,” he calls them—didn’t arrive in California until 1920, by which time his grandfather Giuseppe Franzia had already been making wine there for more than a decade. (The Mondavis, who are old Franzia family friends, started out as grape shippers in the Central Valley; they didn’t own a vineyard until 1943, when Robert Mondavi persuaded his father to buy the Charles Krug Winery, in Napa.) Giuseppe Franzia had emigrated from Italy in 1893. When he was ready to marry, the story goes, he wrote to his girlfriend back home and asked her to come to America; she refused, and her friend Teresa went instead. Teresa and Giuseppe had five boys and two girls. After the repeal of Prohibition, while Giuseppe was in Italy, where he spent six months of every year, Teresa told her sons she wanted to start a commercial winery, and borrowed money from the Bank of Italy (now Bank of America). Soon after that, she loaned Ernest Gallo, who had recently married one of her daughters, five thousand dollars, so that he and his brother Julio could start a winery of their own. Into old age, Teresa worked nine-hour shifts on the bottling line, and cooked three meals a day. “She was a goer—nothing stopped her,” John Franzia told me. “It’s in Fred’s genes.”

The five brothers, including Fred and Joseph’s father, Joseph, and John’s father, John, ran the family business, which was called Franzia Brothers Winery. Like other Central Valley winemakers of the era, they catered to the country’s taste for sweet wines—port, sherry, muscatel. Fred’s family lived with the grandparents on the winery grounds, in Ripon, about ten miles north of Modesto. (One uncle lived in the tank house.) “I grew up working in the vineyard,” Fred says. “Weekends, Saturdays, oh, hell yeah.” After graduating from Santa Clara University, he began to work full time in sales, which many still consider his greatest strength.

The business expanded, and in the early seventies three of the five brothers sold their shares to a New York investment firm, which took the company public. In 1973, Coca-Cola bought Franzia Brothers Winery. Fred was enraged that the family had lost control of the business. “My dad, he was not a fighter,” he says. “He just folded. And he and I went through a period of no communication, I think for five years. I just was pissed.” (Today, the Wine Group, the country’s second-largest wine company, owns Franzia Brothers Winery, and produces box wine under the Franzia name.) Franzia refused to work for Coke, and founded Bronco instead.

Franzia considers his uncle Ernest Gallo, who died two years ago, just before his ninety-eighth birthday, a mentor; one of the things he most admires

BLEECKER STREET

It’s a lovely June afternoon
and I’m heading up Bleecker Street
for a hazelnut espresso latte,
the kind made out of real hazelnuts,
not syrup, hoping it will empty me
of all my bickering ideas about love
and fate and immortality
so I can hear the fertile songs of spring.
Miguel de Unamuno—whose name
is impossible to say without smiling—
believed “self-love widens into love of all that lives.”
Thank God for Unamuno! For hazelnut lattes!
But the infinite archeology of my stupidity
prefers the charms of self-pity
to the equilibrium of self-love.
Perhaps these three Chinese girls
giggling into cell phones, lavishly spending
each moment of their youth, truly believe
the mountain of self has no top
and each breath is a reckoning with fate?
Perhaps these shiny boutiques, each
so resolute, so eager to please, are weary
of decorating the illusions of another century,
prefer the runaway slaves they hid in their root cellars,
their dreams of slaughter and deliverance?

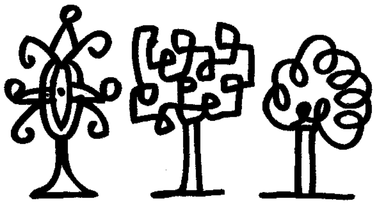
Perhaps this beautiful blond woman,
screeching to a stop in a lilac Mercedes,
pursued by wailing police cars, finally
understands that it is not only for the soul
but for the mind that happiness is a necessity?
"Is the rich bimbo stoned or just stupid?"
an old man, radiant with rage, screams.
Perhaps everyone secretly admires
something momentous about himself,
with the mass and "inner life" of a cathedral,
in the tradition of the Spanish saints and mystics
who cherished the bliss of infinite sacrifice?
Perhaps this street remembers the loneliness
of war widows, the roll calls of absent names,
its first kisses on the corner of West Tenth Street,
the swooning confetti heat of victory,
the scalding springs of defeat? Indeed,
this street is a wave of advocacy
and streaming window peonies and tulips,
a fierce glimpse of history, an echoing
of nightly gunshots, a flag of black pigeons
flowing east toward the end of a continent,
a hunger for immortality, a tiny brusque city,
a bickering idea, a useless boutique,
a fertile song widening into a love for all that lives.

—*Philip Schultz*

about the Gallo business is that it remained independent through generational change. One evening, with the sky streaked pink and blue, Franzia drove past a dense stand of palms, a blotch of darkness surrounded by pale fields, which marks the Gallo homestead. "I ate there a hundred times with him," he said. "I learned from him that, no matter how successful you get, stay grounded. He never wanted to forget he was poor. Bob Mondavi's objective was to forget he was poor. That's the essence of the San Joaquin Valley versus the Napa Valley right there. We are who we are. They want to pretend they're royalty. Bullshit. We're all the same."

Nonetheless, a decade ago Franzia began buying the trademarks of Napa Valley wines. One of these was Napa Ridge, for which he paid forty million dollars. The wine had long been legally produced with non-Napa grapes, owing to a loophole that allowed "geographically misdescriptive" brands to function as long as they were established before 1986. Franzia continued the practice, and also bought, among other labels, Napa Creek and Domaine Napa. In early 2000, as his enormous bottling facility in Napa was nearing completion, James Laube, of *Wine Spectator*, wrote, "The worst-case scenario is that millions of cases of soulless wine carrying the word Napa could flood the market and dilute the meaning and value of Napa's name. By not protecting the Napa Valley name, Napa vintners are about to live a real-life nightmare."

Within months, the Napa Valley Vintners Association, a powerful trade group that had been working on the issue for several years, had persuaded Governor Gray Davis to sign legislation closing the loophole. The new law was to take effect on January 1, 2001; over the Christmas holiday, Franzia filed a suit against the State of California, claiming that the law was unconstitutional. The case, which was finally concluded in 2006, was decided in favor of the state. Franzia's next move was to bring out a wine made from Napa grapes. He sold it, under the Napa Creek label, for $3.99, and dubbed it Four Buck Fred. "That's when everybody really went nuts," he told me, smiling and rolling his eyes. "We just laugh at them. They're just stupid."



People in Napa are mystified by Franzia's double-pronged provocation: appropriation and disdain. "There's a phrase in wine education—there are Wednesday-night wines and then there are Sunday-night wines," Karen MacNeil, the wine writer, says. "They make Sunday-night wines in the Napa Valley, but every vintner in this valley would argue that we all need Wednesday-night wines. Franzia should just leave it at that—say, 'I make Wednesday-night wines. I'm not going to be making the Armani suit, I'm going to be the clothes purveyor to Target.' Instead, he suggests that there's somehow no valid premise for expensive wines."

The Charles Shaw phenomenon is particularly galling to Napa dwellers, as it involves one of their own. Charles Shaw, the man, epitomized the Napa life style of the glamorous eighties, and its folly. Shaw, handsome and rugged and happy-go-lucky, had spent time in France, and his dream was to make Burgundy—in a region where everyone wanted Bordeaux. His wife, Lucy, was beautiful, and a consummate hostess. They had money; a lovely house, with a tennis court, in the middle of their vineyard; and a bunch of good-looking kids. "They were right out of 'Falcon Crest,'" a local winemaker told me—including their messy divorce, their company's eventual bankruptcy, and the sale of the winery on the courthouse steps. (Charles moved to Chicago and works in I.T., on the night shift; Lucy still lives in the valley.) Franzia bought the brand and its trademark in 1995, during the bankruptcy proceedings. He let it sit until 2002, when there was a large excess of wine and he was able to get bargains on the bulk market. He says that the idea occurred to him when his own surplus forced him to sell wine to a competitor for fifty cents a gallon. A two-dollar wine, particularly one with a historical if not an actual relationship to

Napa, was alarming to many Napa winemakers, but it was also a godsend. "What Fred recognized was if we don't purge some of this wine we're going to have an over-all industry disaster," John Barry Jacobs, a vintner who has done business with Franzia over the years, told me. "Fred took the opportunity. The people yelling at him for doing Two Buck were often the same people who sold him the really good juice to make it."

One morning in the middle of March, I met Franzia at the bottling facility, an imposing Mediterranean-style building whose look one Napa winemaker described as "Tuscan warehouse." We sat in an upstairs conference room considerably more lavish than the trailer in Ceres: redwood wainscoting, red leather office chairs, antler chandelier. An assistant brought Franzia a little white ramekin of gorp, which had come from a vending machine in the employee cafeteria. Since losing the right to make "geographically misdescriptive" wines, Franzia has been selling a significant amount of Napa-appellation wine: half a million cases a year, he says, which puts him among the top producers in the region. He buys the wine from local winemakers, a source that he calls "the back door." He does the same with prized appellations all over the state: Sonoma, the Alexander Valley. He told me the story of a recent back-door negotiation in which a prestigious winery had approached him about buying some of its surplus wine. "It wouldn't muster up," he said. "The price started at twenty-five dollars a gallon, went down to twenty, then I got them down to ten. I turned them down at ten, they took it to eight. Finally, I offered them a dollar a gallon if they could deliver it to the winery." He bought it, and masked it in a blend.

On the way out, Franzia called my attention to a large oil painting over the reception desk: a farmworker in a vineyard riding a grape harvester, as bright and idealized a portrayal of the mechanized future as any nineteen-thirties socialist propaganda art. Franzia smirked. "The only painting of a grape harvester you'll see in the Napa Valley," he said.

On any given day, Franzia has about two thousand contract laborers in his fields. Last May, a seventeen-year-old named Maria Isabel Vasquez Jimenez was working near the Bronco headquarters, in a vineyard belonging to West Coast Grape Farming, a company that Fred, Joseph, and John Franzia own. Her job was to train vines to the support wires that run between them. Late in the day, after working in the fields since morning, she became ill. She eventually fell into a coma and died two days later in the hospital. The autopsy report gave "Heat Stroke/Sun Stroke due to Occupational Environmental Exposure" as the cause of death.

The State of California cited the labor contractor that had hired Jimenez, Merced Farm Labor, for a number of violations, including failure to provide accessible drinking water and shade, and fined its owner a record $262,700. United Farm Workers believes that West Coast Grape Farming shares in the responsibility, and, as part of a campaign to call attention to farmworker deaths across the state, urged its supporters to protest Trader Joe's, because of its relationship with the Franzias. Jimenez's mother, who lives in Mexico, has filed a wrongful-death suit naming both West Coast Grape Farming and Merced Farm Labor as defendants. (The defendants deny any culpability.) In late April, the San Joaquin County district attorney submitted a criminal complaint against the owner of Merced Farm Labor and two of her employees, for involuntary manslaughter.

Franzia disputes the claim that water was not available on the day Jimenez died. "That's bullshit," he told me. "We have a wagon continuously bringing water. Her uncle was on the water crew. She was dehydrated and didn't want to drink it." Nonetheless, he is funding the formation of a farm-labor-contractor association whose members will be forced to uphold the rules about water, shade, and safety. Anyone who wants a contract in any of Franzia's vineyards will have to become a member. The intention is to improve working conditions on his properties; the association will also probably create a greater buffer between Franzia's companies and the claims of field workers.

Franzia's vineyards are meticulously maintained. He often drives around in them, making note of bum vines that need to be pulled out, or of places where the wires are exposed. He likes to take his truck straight down the rows; he thinks it's fun for the workers. "Now everybody on the ranch is gonna be pissed 'cause I drove through this crew and I didn't drive through another group," he said, plowing through a vineyard recently. "And when I get stuck, oh, they just go crazy. That's the ultimate. They get to pull me out then. Everyone has a horror story." Scattered through the rows were men in long-sleeved shirts, taking cuttings from the vines and making small bundles to be delivered to the nursery for propagation. "I'm very empathetic with farmworkers, 'cause I think they're mentally considered second- or third-class citizens and it's a goddam crime that people think that way," Franzia said. "They're hardworking human beings. If we didn't have 'em... You write this down: if we didn't have 'em, you guys wouldn't be drinking wine out there."

Franzia stopped beside a metal pole with a white box on top: an owl condo, for pest control. Fishing a pair of pliers from the driver's-side pocket, he got out, and told me to follow him. He crouched at the base of the pole and picked up a chalk-white object, like a crushed eggshell, from the ground: an indigestible gopher skull. Then he banged on the pole with the pliers until a lean brown barn owl with a huge wingspan, disturbed from sleep, swooped out and flew low over the fields. I ducked, and quickly got back in the truck. Franzia started giggling like a maniac. "They come out, usually they lay one about that long," he said, making an exaggerated splat sound. A little later, he said, "I wish that owl would've shit on you. You'd have something to talk about the rest of your life." He laughed until tears came into his eyes.

He drove on, showing me the portable bathrooms, the water trucks, the shade tents, with stakes hammered deep into the ground so the wind wouldn't blow them over. The vineyards changed from Pinot Noir to Pinot Grigio. "I think that lady went down somewhere in this area," he said. "You see those little green ties? They were tying them to the wires. It was the easiest job we have on the ranch." He said that there was a fire department a couple of miles away. "They could've had a paramedic out here in two minutes, and they didn't want 'em. It turned out she was illegal, and they didn't want to get caught. She was using false papers." His voice was hard: whatever empathy he might have felt for the farmworker in general had vanished in the particulars.

We arrived at a gate separating the vineyard from the road. It was locked. "Oh, God damn it," Franzia said, and pulled the wheel sharply left to drive around it. Barrelling through a deep ditch, he started to hum a little tune. "Born to Cheat..." he sang. When he hit the pavement, he crowed, "O.K.! We're out. Beat the gate system."

Franzia has five children—two sons and three daughters—from his first marriage, to his high-school sweetheart, which ended in 1979. His sons work at Bronco (Carlo, a former Navy SEAL, is head of security and carries a Glock, for the protection of company executives); to his daughters—a pediatrician, a housewife, and Gia, "the baby," an aspiring actress in Los Angeles—he assigns a vague public-relations role. For the past two decades, he has lived in a condominium in Modesto. For just as long, he has been imagining his dream house, on a small rise in the middle of the first piece of vineyard land that Bronco bought, not far from its headquarters. He started building the house a year and a half ago, and is self-conscious about the extravagance. "People see this and they'll say, 'Oh, Jesus, here we go,'" he said. He says he's doing it for the kids.

We drove down an avenue of trees to a clearing before a large man-made lake. Beside it was a pool house, and there are plans for an underground bowling alley, the fulfillment of a promise to one of his granddaughters. The main house—single-story, and contemporary in design—is across the lake. When it's finished, it will be trimmed in copper, glass, and Blue Mountain granite. We went inside; the ceilings in the central room are twenty feet high, and the walls are lined with redwood from old wine barrels. Franzia calls the compound Redwood House.

"This is my little girl's, my baby's corner," Franzia said, leading me back to Gia's wing of the house. "She's not married, so she gets to pick, and she wants to be right across from Dad." He showed me her dressing room and bathroom. "She had to have a special-sized bathtub, so we changed this all around," he said indulgently. "Low windows there so nobody can peek at her titties." Across an atrium was the master suite, and a room that Franzia will use as an office, at least for the time being. He is thinking that he might like to get married again. "It could be a baby room, if I have a young enough girl who wants to have babies. I love kids. I love young ladies."

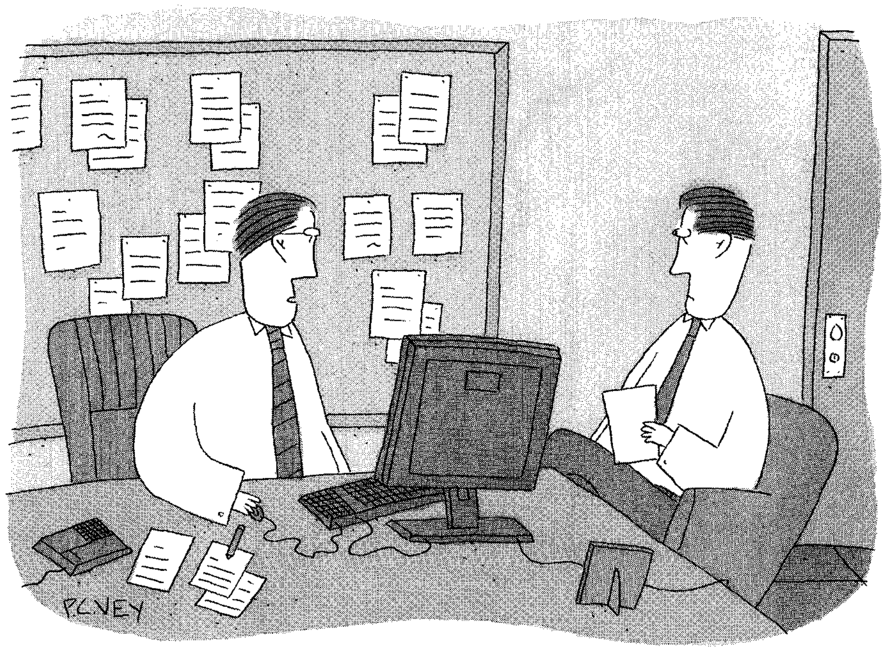
On Valentine's Day, Franzia anonymously sent twenty-five red roses to Gia and twenty-five to his second ex-wife, a former manicurist from Modesto, with whom he has lately been considering a rendezvous. Anya, in the Bronco accounting department, got fifty. It was part of an ongoing campaign. "I don't know if I'm gaining on it," he said. "I'm still trying. I have to be very careful. You can't push 'em too hard, especially when you work with 'em. She's not a climber—that's why I like her. She wants to make money for herself. I could be fleeced so easily."

That night, we went to Ciao Bella, a dinky Italian place in Modesto, with a plastic grapevine on a trellis and white Christmas lights in any season, where Franzia eats dinner most nights of the week. We entered through the back door, because, he said, he values his privacy and everyone tries to talk to him when he walks in. Once inside, however, he immediately stopped at a table where some people he knew were eating, interrupting their dinner to say hello. They were drinking Salmon Creek, a Bronco wine.

Franzia sat down at his regular table, and a waitress, a very slender woman named Erin, came over. Franzia ordered a bottle of Silver Ridge Chardonnay, which is currently his favorite Bronco wine. He recommended the coconut shrimp. They went nicely with the Chardonnay—tangy, oaky, not half bad. Franzia set aside a shrimp for Erin, and nagged her to eat it. After much cajoling, she sat down, perching lightly on the edge of a chair. "I feed this girl every time I'm in here," he said. "She works so hard. I can't put any meat on her bones."

To reach his goal of a hundred million cases a year, Franzia will need to build a glass factory where he can make his own bottles. (Gallo has one.) He is just waiting until he has enough cash. "The lenders would give us anything we want," he said. "But you won't see me borrowing money. We're so solid it's scary."

The next day was chilly, and the sky was full of dark-gray rain clouds. Sitting in the trailer, wearing a dark-green sweater and turtleneck, Franzia went back over the most important points, the things he really wanted me to understand. "We make wine for the people," he said. "Napa and all their funny money—they're all getting knocked off their thrones. I'm not falling. I'm built on rock." When the rain started, he walked outside, looked up, smacked his lips, and said, "Money." ♦

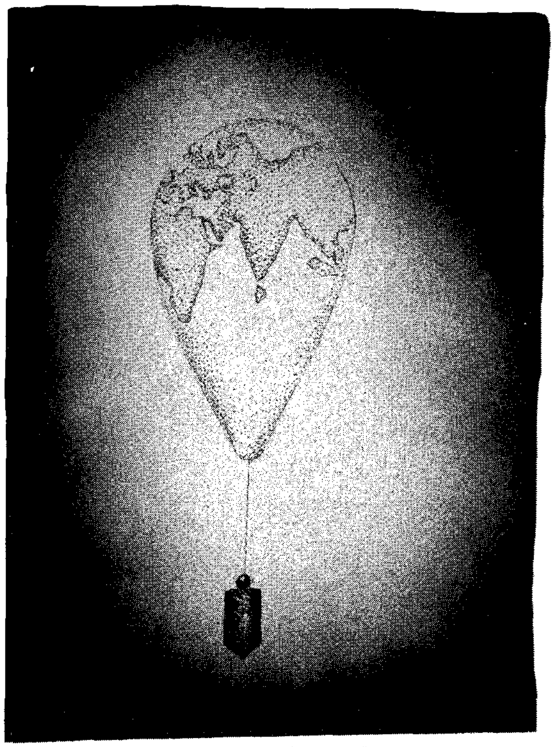


"Sometimes I think the collaborative process would work better without you."

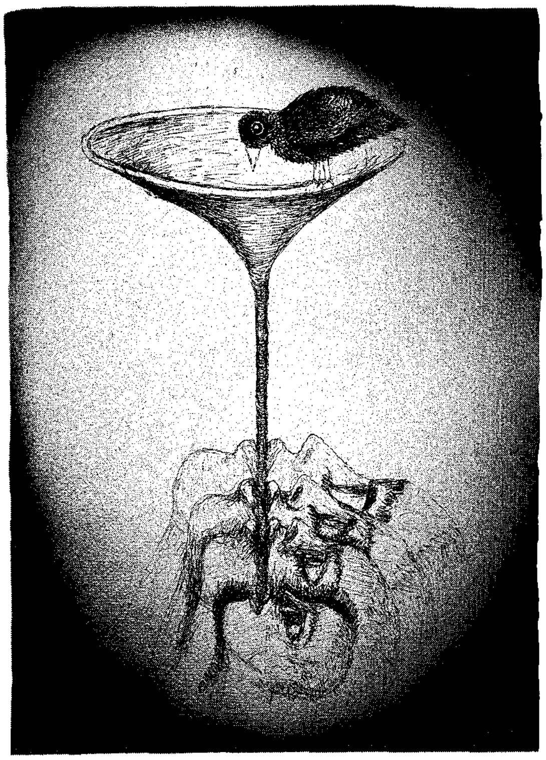
FICTION

IN THE SOUTH

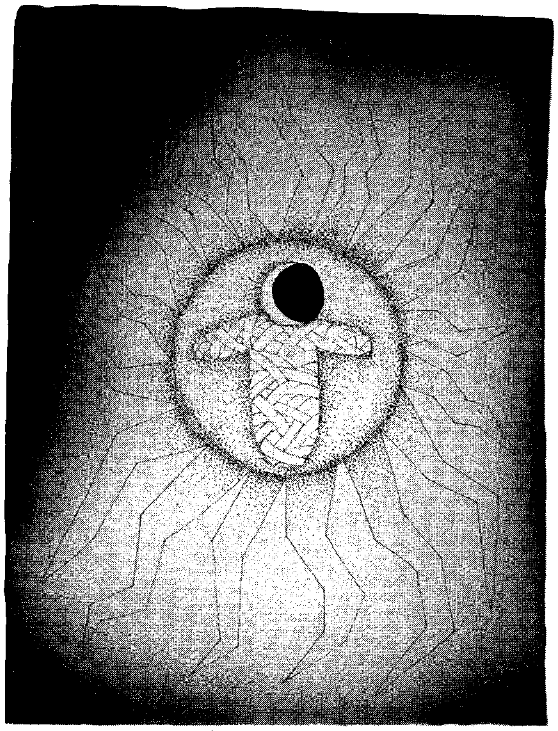
BY SALMAN RUSHDIE



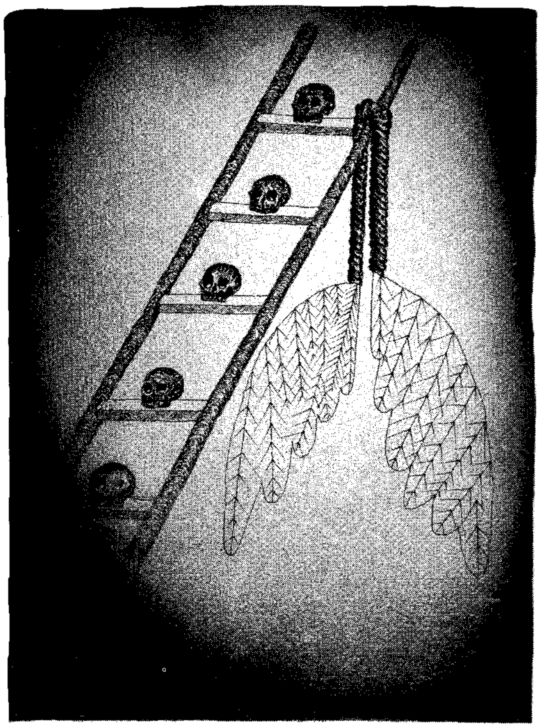
WE ARE MEN OF THE SOUTH



JUNIOR AND SENIOR SPOKE WITH ONE VOICE



BABYDOM IS NOT ONLY OUR PAST, BUT OUR FUTURE TOO



WHAT ELSE, WOMAN, IS DEATH?

The day that Junior fell down began like any other day: the explosion of heat rippling the air, the trumpeting sunlight, the traffic's tidal surges, the prayer chants in the distance, the cheap film music rising from the floor below, the loud pelvic thrusts of an "item number" dancing across a neighbor's TV, a child's cry, a mother's rebuke, unexplained laughter, scarlet expectorations, bicycles, the newly plaited hair of schoolgirls, the smell of strong sweet coffee, a green wing flashing in a tree. Senior and Junior, two very old men, opened their eyes in their bedrooms on the fourth floor of a sea-green building on a leafy lane, just out of sight of Elliot's Beach, where, that evening, the young would congregate, as they always did, to perform the rites of youth, not far from the village of the fisherfolk, who had no time for such frivolity. The poor were puritans by night and day. As for the old, they had rites of their own and did not need to wait for evening. With the sun stabbing at them through their window blinds, the two old men struggled to their feet and lurched out onto their adjacent verandas, emerging at almost the same moment, like characters in an ancient tale, trapped in fateful coincidences, unable to escape the consequences of chance.

Almost at once they began to speak. Their words were not new. These were ritual speeches, obeisances to the new day, offered in call-and-response format, like the rhythmic dialogues or "duels" of the virtuosos of Carnatic music during the annual December festival.

"Be thankful we are men of the south," Junior said, stretching and yawning. "Southerners are we, in the south of our city in the south of our country in the south of our continent. God be praised. We are warm, slow, and sensual guys, not like the cold fishes of the north." Senior, scratching first his belly and then the back of his neck, contradicted him at once. "In the first place," Senior said, "the south is a fiction, existing only because men have agreed to call it that. Suppose men had imagined the earth the other way up! We would be the northerners then. The universe does not understand up and down; neither does a dog. To a dog, there is no north or south. In this regard, the points of the compass are like money, which has value only because men say that it does. And in the second place you're not that warm a character, and a woman would laugh to hear you call yourself sensual. But you are slow—that is beyond a doubt."

This was how they were: they fought, going at each other like ancient wrestlers whose left feet were tied together at the ankles. The rope that bound them so tightly was their name. By a curious chance—which they had come to think of as "destiny" or, as they more often called it, "a curse"—they shared a name, a long name like so many names of the south, a name that neither of them cared to speak. By banishing the name, by reducing it to its initial letter, "V.," they made the rope invisible, which did not mean that it did not exist. They echoed each other in other ways—their voices were high, they were of a similarly wiry build and medium height, they were both nearsighted, and, after a lifetime of priding themselves on the quality of their teeth, they had both surrendered to the humiliating inevitability of dentures—but it was the unused name, that symmetrical V., the Name That Could Not Be Spoken, that had joined them together, like Siamese twins, for decades. The two old men did not share a birthday, however. One was seventeen days older than the other. That must have been how "Senior" and "Junior" got started, though the nicknames had been in use so long now that nobody could remember who had originally thought them up. V. Senior and V. Junior they had become, Junior V. and Senior V. forevermore, quarrelling to the death. They were eighty-one years old.

"You look terrible," Junior told Senior, as he did every morning. "You look like a man who is only waiting to die."

Senior—nodding gravely, and also speaking in accordance with their private tradition—responded, "That is better than looking, as you do, like a man who is still waiting to live."

Neither man slept well anymore. At night they lay on hard beds without pillows and, behind their closed eyelids, their unsettled thoughts ran in opposite directions. Of the two men, V. Senior had lived by far the fuller life. He had been the youngest of ten brothers, all of whom had excelled in their chosen fields—as athletes, scientists, teachers, soldiers, priests. He himself had begun his career as a college-champion long-distance runner, had then risen to a senior position with the railway company, and for years had travelled the railroads, covering tens of thousands of miles to assure himself and the authorities that the proper safety levels were being maintained. He had married a kind woman and fathered six daughters and three sons, each of whom had proved fertile in his or her turn, providing him with a haul of thirty-three grandchildren. His nine brothers had sired a total of thirty-three more children, his nephews and nieces, who had inflicted upon him no fewer than a hundred and eleven further relatives. To many this would have been proof of his good fortune, for a man blessed with two hundred and four family members was a rich man indeed, but abundance gave the ascetically inclined Senior a permanent low-level headache. "If I had been sterile," he told Junior frequently, "how peaceful life would be."

After his retirement, Senior had been one of a group of ten friends who met every day to discuss politics, chess, poetry, and music at a local Besant Nagar coffeehouse, and several of his commentaries on these topics had been published in the excellent daily newspaper based in the city. Among his friends was the editor of that newspaper, and also one of the editor's employees—a celebrated local figure, a bit of a firebrand and too much of a boozer, but the creator of wonderfully grotesque political cartoons. Then there was the city's finest astrologer, who had been trained as an astronomer but had come to believe that the true messages of the stars could not be received through a telescope; and a fellow who for many years had fired the starting pistol at the racetrack's well-attended meets; and so on. Senior had revelled in the company of these men, telling his wife that it was a grand thing for a man to have friends from whom he could learn something new every day. But now they were all dead. His friends had gone up in flames one by one, and the coffeehouse that might have preserved their memory had been torn down, too. Of the ten brothers only he remained, and the brothers' wives, too, were long departed. Even his own kindly wife was dead, and he had remarried, finding himself a woman with a wooden leg, toward whom he behaved with an irritability that surprised his children and grandchildren. "Not having much choice at my age," he would say to her, hurtfully, "I chose you." She retaliated

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: "IN THE SOUTH" II, XI, XV, XIII (2009)/FRANCESCO CLEMENTE

by ignoring his simplest demands, even requests for water, which no civilized person should ever refuse. Her name was Aarthi, but he never used it. Nor did he call her by a diminutive or an endearment. To him she was always "Woman" or "Wife."

Senior endured the multiple health problems of the very old, the daily penances of bowel and urethra, of back and knee, the milkiness climbing in his eyes, the breathing troubles, the nightmares, the slow failing of the soft machine. His days emptied out into tedious inaction. Once, he had given lessons in mathematics, singing, and the Vedas to pass the time. But his pupils had all gone away. There remained the wife with the wooden leg, the blurry television set, and Junior. It was not, by a long chalk, enough. Each morning he regretted that he had not died in the night. Of his two hundred and four family members, quite a few had already gone to their fiery rest. He forgot exactly how many, and their names, inevitably, eluded him. Many of the survivors came to see him and treated him with gentleness and care. When he said that he was ready to die, which was often, their faces took on hurt expressions and their bodies sagged or stiffened, depending on their nature, and they spoke to him reassuringly, encouragingly, and, of course, in injured tones, of the value of a life so full of love. But love had begun to annoy him, like everything else. His was a family of mosquitoes, he thought, a buzzing swarm, and love was their itchy bite. "If only there were a coil one could light to keep one's relations away," he told Junior. "If only there were a net around one's cot that kept them out."

Junior's life had been a disappointment to him. He had not expected to be ordinary. He had been reared by doting parents who had instilled in him a sense of destiny and entitlement, but he had turned out to be an average sort of fellow, doomed by average academic achievement to a life of clerical work in the offices of the municipal water board. His above-average dreams—of road travel, rail travel, air travel, perhaps even space travel—had long since been abandoned. Yet he was not an unhappy man. The discovery of his affliction with the incurable disease of mediocrity might have cowed a less ebullient spirit, but he remained bright-eyed, with a ready smile for the world. Still, in spite of his apparent enthusiasm for life, there was a certain deficiency in the energy department. He did not run but walked, and walked slowly—had done so even in the distant years of his youth. He abhorred exercise and had a way of poking gentle fun at those who took it. Nor did he interest himself in politics, or the all-pervasive popular culture of the cinema and the music that it spawned. In all significant particulars, he had failed to be a participant in the parade of life. He had not married. The great events of eight decades had managed to occur without any effort on his part to help them along. He had stood by and watched as an empire fell and a nation rose, and avoided expressing an opinion on the matter. He had been a man at a desk. Maintaining the flow of the municipality's water had been a sufficient challenge for him. Yet he gave every appearance of being a man for whom living was still a joy. He had been an only child, so there were few relatives to look out for him in his advanced years. Senior's immense family had adopted him long ago and brought him tiffin and attended to his needs.

The question of the dividing wall between Senior's and Junior's adjoining apartments was sometimes raised by the visiting hordes of Senior's blood kin: whether it should be taken down so that the two old men could share their lives more easily. On this matter, however, Junior and Senior spoke with one voice.

"No!" Junior said.

"Over my dead body," Senior clarified.

"Which would make the whole exercise pointless, anyhow," Junior said, as if that settled things.

The wall remained in place.

Junior had one friend, D'Mello, a man twenty years younger than him, an old colleague from his water-board days. D'Mello had grown up in another city, Mumbai, the legendary bitch-city, *urbs prima in Indis*, and had to be spoken to in English. Whenever D'Mello visited Junior, Senior sulked and refused to speak, even though, secretly, he was proud of his prowess in what he called "the world's No. 1 tongue." Junior tried to hide from Senior how much he looked forward to D'Mello's comings; the younger man bubbled with a kind of cosmopolitan brio that Junior found inspirational. D'Mello always arrived with stories—sometimes angry accounts of injustices against the poor in a Mumbai slum, sometimes funny anecdotes about the characters who took their ease at the Wayside Inn, the famous Mumbai café in the Kala Ghoda area, named for a no longer present equestrian statue, "the Black Horse district from which the black horse has been exiled." D'Mello fell in love with movie stars (from a distance, of course), and provided gory details of the killing spree of a not-yet-arrested madman in the district of Trombay. "The miscreant is still at large!" he cried gaily. His conversation was littered with wonderful names: Worli Sea Face, Bandra, Hornby Vellard, Breach Candy, Pali Hill. These places sounded altogether more exotic than the prosaic localities to which Junior was accustomed: Besant Nagar, Adyar, Mylapore.

D'Mello's most heartbreaking Mumbai story was his tale of the great poet of the city, who had surrendered to Alzheimer's disease. The poet still walked to his small magazine-infested office every day, without knowing why he went there. His feet knew the way, and so he went and sat looking into space until it was time to go home again and his feet walked him back to his shabby residence, through the evening crowds massing outside Churchgate station—the jasmine sellers, the hustling urchins, the roar of the B.E.S.T. buses, the girls on their Vespas, the sniffing, hungry dogs.

When D'Mello was present and talking, Junior had the sense that he was living another, very different life, a life of action and color; that he was becoming, vicariously, the type of man he had never been—dynamic, passionate, engaged with the world. Senior, observing the light in Junior's eyes, inevitably became cross. One day, when D'Mello was speaking of Mumbai and its people with his habitual, gesticulating fervor, Senior, breaking his rule of silence, snapped at him in English, "Why your body doesn't return there only since your head has already gone?" But D'Mello shook his head sadly. He no longer had a foothold in his city of origin. Only in his dreams and conversations was it still his home. "I will die here," he answered Senior. "In the south, among sour fruits like you."

Senior's wife, the lady with the wooden leg, increasingly took her revenge upon her unloving husband by filling their apartment with family members. She, too, came from a large family, of hundreds

He's lying! Just like all men! Oh God, mother was right—I'm never getting married, am I?
Farley Katz

of persons, and she began most particularly to invite her younger relations, the great-nephews and great-nieces, with their wives and husbands and, especially, their babies in tow. The presence in the small apartment of large numbers of babies, toddlers, high-speed pigtailed girls, and slow plump boys fulfilled her own matriarchal ambitions, and also, very satisfyingly, drove Senior wild. It was the babies-in-law that really got his goat. The babies-in-law rattled their rattles and giggled their giggles and screamed their baby screams. They slept, and then Senior had to be quiet, or they woke up, and then Senior could not hear himself think. They ate and defecated and puked, and the smell of excrement and vomit remained in the apartment, even when the babies-in-law had gone, mingling with a smell that Senior disliked even more: that of talcum powder. "At the end of life," he complained to Junior, in whose apartment he often took refuge from the squalling hordes of his and his wife's blood kin, "nothing stinks worse than the smells of life's sweet beginning—bibs and ribbons and warm bottled milk and formula, and farting, talcumed behinds." Junior could not help replying, "Soon you also will be helpless and need someone to tend to your natural functions. Babydom is not only our past but our future, too." The thunderous expression on Senior's face revealed that the words had hit their mark.

For, it's true, they were both fortunate men. They were neither wholly blind nor wholly deaf, and their minds had not betrayed them like the Mumbai poet's. The food they ate was soft and easily digestible, but it was not old buggers' mush. Above all they were still ambulatory, still able, once a week, to climb slowly down their building's stairs to street level, and then to shuffle along, helped by walking sticks and frequent little rest stops, to the local post office, where they cashed their pension slips. They did not need to do this. Many of the young who thronged Senior's apartment, driving him next door to quarrel with Junior, would readily have dashed down the street to cash the checks for the frail old gentlemen. But the gentlemen did not care to allow the young to dash for them. It was a point of pride to cash one's own pension slip—on this, if on nothing else, they agreed—to travel under one's own steam to the counter where, behind a metal grille, a postal-services operative waited to dispense the weekly sum that was their return for a lifetime's service. "You can see the respect in the fellow's expression," Senior said loudly to Junior, who kept mum, because what he saw behind the grille was something more like boredom, or contempt.

To Senior the pension trip was an act of validation; the weekly sum, small as it was, honored his deeds, transmuting into banknotes society's gratitude for his life. Junior thought of the journey more as an act of defiance. "You care nothing for me," he once said flatly to the face behind the grille. "It means nothing to you to count out the cash. But, when your turn comes to stand where I stand, then you will comprehend." One of the few privileges of very old age was that you were allowed to say exactly what you thought, even to strangers. Nobody told you to keep your mouth shut, and few people had the guts to answer back. They think we will soon be dead, Junior thought, so there's no point getting into a fight with us. He understood the nature of the contempt in the eyes of the post-office employee. It was the scorn of life for death.

On the day that Junior fell down, he and Senior set forth on their errand at their customary midmorning hour. It was late in the year. The local Christians, D'Mello included, had just finished celebrating their Savior's birth, and the consequent proximity of New Year's Eve—with its promise of a future, of, indeed, an interminable future in which a sequence of such Eves stretched out at their predetermined intervals toward infinity—was bothering Senior. "Either I will die in the next five days, meaning that there will be no new year for me," he told Junior, "or else a year will begin in which my end will surely come, which is hardly a thing to look forward to." Junior sighed. "Your gloom and doom," he moaned, "will be the death of me." This sentence struck them both as so funny that they laughed heartily, and then for a while they had to huff and puff for breath. They were descending their building's staircase at this point, so the laughter was not without danger. They clung to the bannisters and panted. Junior was lower down than Senior, past the second-floor landing. This was how they customarily descended, some distance apart, so that if one of them should fall he would not drag the other down with him. They were too unsteady to trust each other. Trust, too, was a casualty of age.

In the front yard they paused briefly by the golden-shower tree that stood there. They had watched it grow from a tiny shoot to its present sixty-foot grandeur. It had grown quickly, and, though they did not say so, this rapid growth had disturbed them, suggesting, as it did, the speed of the passing of the years. The Indian laburnum: that was another name for it, a name among many names. It was *konrai* in their own, southern language, *amaltas* in the tongue of the north, *Cassia fistula* in the language of flowers and trees. "It has stopped growing now," Junior said, approvingly, "having understood that eternity is better than progress. In the eye of God, time is eternal. This even animals and trees can comprehend. Only men have the illusion that time moves." Senior snorted. "The tree has stopped," he said, "because that is in its nature, just as it is in ours. We, too, will stop soon enough." He placed his gray trilby on his head and moved through the gate into the lane. Junior was bareheaded and traditionally dressed in a white *veshti* and a long blue checked shirt and sandals, but Senior liked to go to the post office in the guise of a European gentleman, wearing a suit and hat and twirling a silver-handled walking stick, like that Beau-somebody of Piccadilly of whom he had read, or the man in the old song he liked, *who walked along the Bois de Boulogne with an independent air*, the Man That Broke the Bank at Monte Caaar-lo.

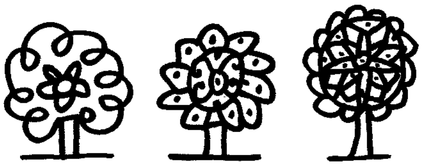
The shady lane gave way to the brilliant sun-soaked street, where the noise of traffic drowned out the softer music of the sea. The beach was just four blocks away, but the city didn't care. Junior and Senior shuffled slowly past the homeopathy shop, the pharmacy where prescription drugs could easily be bought without troubling any doctor, the general store, with its jars of nuts and chilies, its tins of clarified butter and its imported cheese, and the sidewalk bookstall, with its many pirated editions of popular books brazenly on display, and set their sights on the traffic lights a hundred yards ahead. There they would have to cross the lawless main road, where a dozen forms of transport battled for space. After that a left turn, and another hundred yards of walking, and then they would be at the post office. A five-minute journey for the young, half an hour each way, minimum, for the two old men. The sun was behind them, and both men, inching slowly forward, were looking down at their shadows, which lay side by side upon the dusty pavement. Like lovers, they both thought, but neither of them spoke, their habit of opposition being too ingrained to permit them to express so fond an idea.

Afterward, Senior regretted that he had not spoken. "He was my shadow," he said to the woman with the wooden leg, "and I was his. Two shadows, each shadowing the other, to that we were reduced, that is so. The old move through the world of the young like shades, unseen, of no concern. But the shadows see each other and know who they are. So it was with us. We knew, let me say this, who we were. And now I am a shadow without a shadow to shadow. He who knew me knows nothing now, and therefore I am not known. What else, woman, is death?"

"The day you stop talking," she replied. "The day these tomfool notions stop dropping from your mouth. When your mouth itself has been eaten by the fire. That will be the day." It was the most she had said to him in more than a year, and he understood from it that she hated him, and was sorry that Junior was the one who had fallen.

It happened because of the girls on the Vespa, the girls on their new Vespa making their way to college, pigtails horizontal behind them as, giggling, they rode toward murder. Their faces were vivid in Senior's mind, the long thin one driving the scooter and her chubbier friend behind her, holding on *for dear life*. But life was not dear to such persons. Life was cheap, like a garment idly flung away after a single use, like their music, like their thoughts. This was how he judged them, and when he discovered afterward that they were not at all like his unjust characterization it was too late to change his mind. They were serious students, the thin one of electrical engineering and the other of architecture, and, far from being unaffected by the accident, they both went into dreadful, guilt-ridden shock, and for weeks afterward they could be seen almost every day standing silently with lowered heads across the lane from Junior's home, just standing there, heads bowed in expiation, waiting for forgiveness. But there was nobody to forgive them; the one who would have done so had died, and the one who could have done so would not. Haughty Senior looked down upon them with disdain. What did they think a human life was? Could it be so cheaply bought off? No, it could not. Let them stand there for a thousand years, it would not be long enough.

The Vespa had wobbled, no doubt about that; its young driver was inexperienced and it had wobbled too close to where Junior stood, waiting to cross the road. Of late he had been complaining of a weakness in his ankles. He had said, "Sometimes when I get out of bed I do not think that they will bear my weight." He had also said, "Sometimes when I go down the stairs I worry that an ankle will turn. I never used to worry about my ankles, but now I do." Senior had responded adversarially, as was customary. "Worry about your interior," he had said. "Your kidneys or your liver will fail long before your ankle does." However, he had been wrong. The Vespa had come too close and Junior had leaped back. When he landed on his left foot, his ankle had indeed turned, and that had induced a second half-leap, as Junior tried to save himself. So it had been a strange fall, more like a hop and a skip, but at the end there was the tumble, and Junior, toppling backward to the sidewalk, had bumped his head, not hard enough to be knocked out, but, still, hard enough. He was winded, too. Air left him in a great *whoosh* as he clattered down.



Senior was too busy shouting at the terrified girls on the Vespa, calling them assassins and worse things, to notice the moment when the thing happened that must happen to us all in the end, when the last little puff of vapor pops out of our mouths and dissolves into fetid air. "The spirit, whatever it is," Junior used to say. "I do not believe in an immortal soul, but I also do not believe that we are only flesh and bone. I believe in a mortal soul, the non-corporeal essence of ourselves, lurking within our flesh like a parasite, flourishing when we flourish, and dying when we die." Senior was more formal in his religious beliefs. He read the ancient texts often, and the sound of Sanskrit was for him akin to the music of the spheres—the subtlety and profundity of those texts, which were capable of questioning whether even the creative entity itself understood its creation. Once, he had discussed these texts with his students, but there had not been any students for a long time, and he had been obliged to keep his own counsel on the grand matters of being. The ancient ambiguities gave him joy; Junior's lay-philosophical invention of a soul that died was banal by comparison.

So Senior thought, and, ranting as he was, he missed the telltale little puff of air that might have persuaded him to think again. An instant later there was no Junior anymore, just a body on the sidewalk, a thing to be disposed of before the heat of the tropics did its malodorous worst. There was only one thing to be done. Senior reached into his friend's pocket and took out the pension slip. Then, sending the Vespa girls to his apartment to speak to his wife and relations, he set off on his mission alone. There would be time for death to be respected. In the traditions of the Palakkad Aiyars or Iyers, from whom both he and Junior were descended, the rites in honor of the dead lasted for thirteen days.

The next morning, in the south of the planet, far away from Senior's home town, but not far enough, there was a great earthquake under the ocean's surface, and the mighty water, answering the agony of the land beneath it with an agony of its own, gathered itself up into a series of waves and hurled its pain across the globe. Two such waves travelled across the Indian Ocean and, at a quarter to seven in the morning, Senior felt his bed begin to shake. It was a violent and puzzling vibration, because there had never been an earthquake in this city. Senior got up and went out onto his veranda. The veranda next door was empty, of course. Junior was gone. Junior was ashes now. The neighbors were all out in the lane, improperly dressed, hugging blankets around their shoulders. Everyone had a radio on. The earthquake's epicenter had been near the distant island of Sumatra. The tremors stopped and people went on with their day. Two and a quarter hours later, the first giant wave arrived.

The coastal areas were smashed. Elliot's Beach, Marina Beach, the beachfront houses, the cars, the Vespas, the people. At ten o'clock in the morning, the sea made a second such assault. The numbers of the dead grew: the lost dead, taken by the sea, the marooned dead, washed up on the remnants of the sands, the broken dead, everywhere the dead. The waves did not get as far as Senior's house. Senior's lane was undamaged. Everybody lived.

Except Junior.

It was fortunate that the waves arrived at Elliot's Beach in the morning. The romantic young who laughed and flirted there in the evenings would all have been slain if the waves had come at night. So young friends and lovers survived. The fishermen were not so lucky. The nearby fishing village—its name was Nochikuppam—ceased to exist. A seaside temple remained standing, but the fishermen's huts and catamarans and many of the fisherfolk themselves were lost. After that day the fishermen who survived said that they hated the sea and refused to return to it. For a long time it was hard to buy fish in the markets.

Senior did not like the Japanese word everyone used to name the waters of death. To him the waves were Death itself and needed no other name. Death had come to his city, had come a-harvesting and had taken Junior and many strangers away. In the aftermath of the waves, there grew up all around him, like a forest, the noises and actions that inevitably follow on calamity—the good behavior of the kind, the bad behavior of the desperate and the powerful, the surging aimless crowds. He was lost in the forest of the aftermath and saw nothing except the empty veranda next to his own and, in the lane below, the girls with the lowered heads. News came that D'Mello was among the lost. D'Mello, too, was gone. Perhaps he was not dead. Perhaps he had simply gone home, at last, to his storied city of Mumbai, on the country's other coast, that city which was neither of the north nor of the south but a frontierville, the greatest, most wondrous, and most dreadful of all such places, the megalopolis of the borderlands, the place of in-between. Or, on the other hand, perhaps D'Mello had drowned and Death, swallowing him, had denied his body the Christian dignity of a grave.

He, Senior, was the one who had asked for death. Yet Death had left him alive, had taken so many others, had taken even Junior and D'Mello, but left him untouched. The world was meaningless. There was no meaning to be found in it, he thought. The texts were empty and his eyes were blind. Perhaps he said some of this aloud. He may even have shouted it out. The girls in the lane below were looking up at him, and the green birds in the golden-shower tree were disturbed. Then, all of a sudden, he imagined that across the way, on the empty adjacent veranda, he saw a shadow move. He had cried out, "Why not me?," and in response a shadow had flickered where Junior used to stand. Death and life were just adjacent verandas. Senior stood on one of them as he always had, and on the other, continuing their tradition of many years, was Junior, his shadow, his namesake, arguing. ♦

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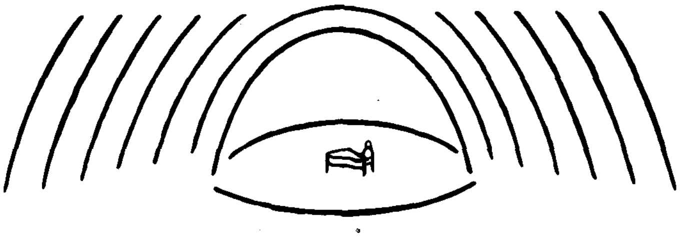

BOOKS

SLANG-WHANGER

William Hazlitt's impetuous prose.

BY ARTHUR KRYSTAL

Prepare yourself: you cannot be both a Coleridgean and a Hazlittean. I'm sorry, but it needed to be said. This doesn't mean that you can't like both "Kubla Khan" and "The Indian Jugglers," but somewhere along the line you have to choose. It's an ontological thing. Coleridge had an idealizing nature, Hazlitt a skeptical one. Coleridge gravitated toward the Absolute; Hazlitt fled from it. Coleridge believed that poetry was generated by "severe laws of the intellect"; Hazlitt believed that it was forged in the crucible of the sympathetic imagination. Coleridge argued that opposites exist in order to be reconciled; Hazlitt couldn't reconcile himself to that—or to much else, for that matter.

Of course, these differences did not constitute a problem until 1983, when David Bromwich forced us to take sides, with his unsurpassed study of Hazlitt's œuvre, "Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic." In fact, until Bromwich came along, most students of literature didn't know there *was* an œuvre. They might have read some of the better-known essays—"On Gusto" or "My First Acquaintance with Poets"—but how many had ever bothered to crack open P. P. Howe's 1930-34 edition of Hazlitt's Complete Works, consisting of twenty-one volumes?

The truth is most people prefer Coleridge. Coleridge was a poet and did poetic things like smoke opium. He was also a critic and semi-philosopher, whose Biographia Literaria transformed literary criticism into a field of study distinct from literature itself. Hazlitt was also a critic and a self-styled metaphysician, but mostly he was seen as a working journalist and essayist, albeit one with such strong opinions that T. S. Eliot decided he was guilty of "crimes against taste."

It's only in the past couple of decades that Hazlitt has been enjoying a serious revival, mainly through the efforts of Michael Foot, the former leader of Britain's Labour Party. Nearly four years ago, when he was ninety-two, Foot, who credits Hazlitt with giving to "the English Left a perspective and philosophy as widely ranging as Burke had given to the English Right," founded the Hazlitt Society, whose members include, among others, the poet Tom Paulin, the philosopher A. C. Grayling, and the literature professors Jon Cook, Uttara Natarajan, and Duncan Wu. These are not fair-weather Hazlitteans. They read one another's manuscripts, write prefaces and laudatory introductions to one another's books, and band together to edit Hazlitt's writings. Between 1998 and 2005, they accounted for two major biographies, four critical studies, a nine-volume edition of Hazlitt's writings, and three smaller editions. Two years ago, Jon Cook published "Hazlitt in Love" and Duncan Wu presented us with a two-volume set of Hazlitt's uncollected writings. Wu has now followed up with "William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man" (Oxford; $45), which, even more than its predecessors, argues for Hazlitt's cultural centrality.

Four things commend Hazlitt to his followers: his fierce radicalism, his sensitive and critical intelligence, his alternately sunny and sullen disposition, and his prose—his "vigorous," "versatile," "flexible," "slouchy," "layered," "sauntering," "cascading," "nervy," "sinewy," "textured" prose. For Tom Paulin, Hazlitt is nothing less than "the first great theatre critic in English, the first great art critic, a magnificent political journalist and polemicist." A. C. Grayling, showing restraint, calls him simply "the greatest prose writer of the age." So how come you haven't read him? Or, if you have, why isn't his portrait hanging in your den? No need to feel guilty. According to Paulin, Hazlitt "is almost never read or cited or studied."

William Hazlitt was born in Maidstone, Kent, on April 10, 1778. His mother was the daughter of a Dissenting ironmonger from Suffolk; his father was the son of Irish Presbyterians who later became a Unitarian minister. An outspoken advocate for social and political reform, the Reverend Hazlitt, after a five-year posting in America, was assigned to the village of Wem, in Shropshire, where it was thought he could do the least harm. He hoped that his son would enter the ministry and sent him to the Unitarian New College, at Hackney, in London, where the fifteen-year-old Hazlitt encountered the political writings of Hume, Godwin, and Priestley. By his second year, he had forgotten about ordination and, much to the disappointment of his parents, left the college. He had decided to become a painter and a philosopher.

Hazlitt was still shuttling between London and his parents' house when, in 1798, Coleridge, himself a Unitarian minister, came to Shrewsbury to preach. Hazlitt walked the ten miles from Wem to hear him, and two days later Coleridge paid a call on the Reverend Hazlitt. The next morning, Coleridge invited the young Hazlitt to visit him in Somerset. Hazlitt then walked Coleridge six miles down the road, listening as the other man dilated on various philosophers, talking so rapidly that he appeared "to float in air, to slide on ice." Hazlitt was exhilarated, and that winter all he could think was: "I was to visit Coleridge in the Spring."

When Hazlitt finally arrived in Somerset, Coleridge introduced him to

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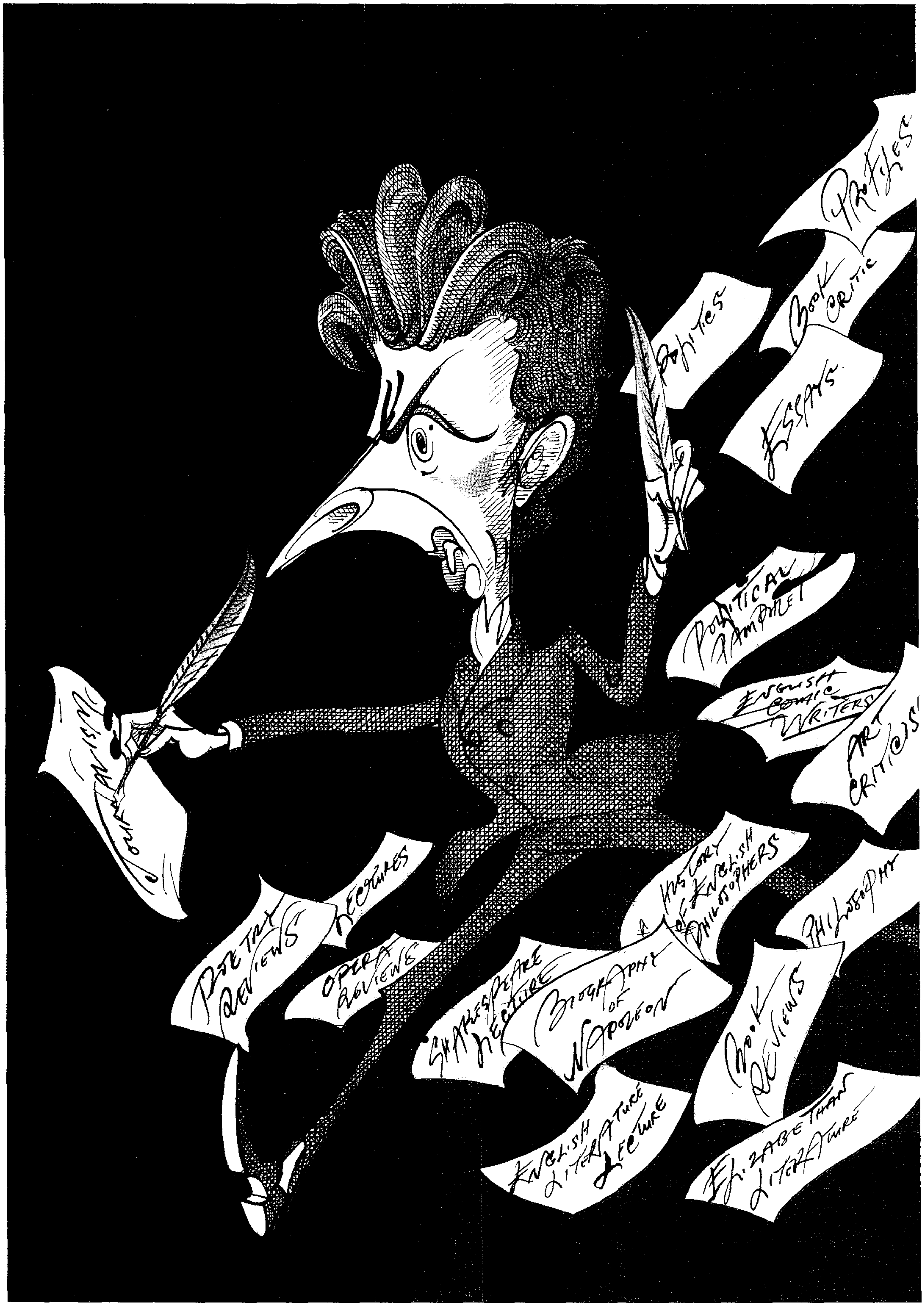
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No one had written criticism quite like Hazlitt's before. To him, prose, just like poetry, reflected a fundamental world view.

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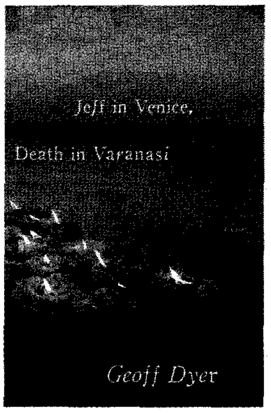

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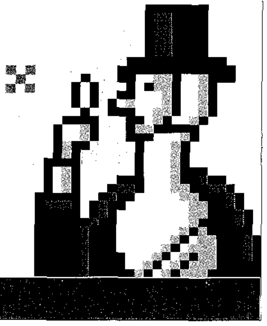


Wordsworth, his collaborator on the "Lyrical Ballads." Although Hazlitt was deeply impressed by Wordsworth, he felt closer to Coleridge. The two men were well matched; both were self-absorbed, but one loved to talk incessantly and the other liked to listen. Coleridge, in thrall to Kant and Schiller, expatiated on the relations between sensation, thought, and feeling; Hazlitt, a disciple of Hume, stressed the mental involutions that drive behavior. Coleridge seemed dazzled by the mind's intricate pattern, Hazlitt by the texture of its weave. Years later, Hazlitt wrote about Coleridge as though recalling a schoolboy crush: "He is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt anything. . . . His voice rolled on the air like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought."

After moving to London to study painting, in 1799, Hazlitt was introduced into the literary circle of Charles Lamb and his sister Mary. He managed to obtain a few commissions (his portrait of Lamb is in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery), but he was slow, and he didn't bother to prettify his subjects. In 1808, he married a friend of the Lambs, Sarah Stoddart, with whom he had a son. Too poor to live in London, they rented a house in Wiltshire, where Hazlitt painted and also began to write in earnest. Since portraiture wasn't paying the bills, and Sarah Hazlitt was getting testy, he took a job in 1812 as a parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*. Before long, he was reviewing drama, poetry, operas, novels, and art exhibitions for the *Chronicle* and other magazines, and, by the end of the decade, he had become the most formidable critic of his day.

Hazlitt was probably the first critic to think hard about prose and the first to recognize that prose, no less than poetry, reflected a fundamental world view. Just as Coleridge and Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads" had discarded the formality and cadence of the Augustan poets, so Hazlitt rejected the exact and measured language of Sir Thomas Browne and Samuel Johnson, fashioning a prose whose emotional and political intensity colored everything he wrote. In approaching the arts, he combined the coolness of a surgeon with the fervor of an adept. When operating on a poem, he made the blood flow just enough not to leave any drops on the floor. "He is so afraid of doing wrong . . . that he does little or nothing," Hazlitt said of Thomas Campbell. And he *liked* Campbell's poetry. He also admired Shelley, but couldn't overlook his weakness for intellectual fads: "With his zeal, his talent, and his fancy, he would do more good and less harm, if he were to give up his wilder theories, and if he took less pleasure in feeling his heart flutter in unison with the panic-struck apprehensions of his readers." And when discussing Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" Hazlitt examined the nature of poetry itself:

> The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power. . . . The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle. It aims at effect, it exists by contrast. It admits of no medium. It is every thing by excess. It rises above the ordinary standard of sufferings and crimes. It presents a dazzling appearance. . . . Poetry is right-royal. It puts the individual for the species, the one above the infinite many, might before right. A lion hunting a flock of sheep or a herd of wild asses is a more poetical object than they; and we even take part with the lordly beast, because our vanity or some other feeling makes us disposed to place ourselves in the situation of the strongest party.

No one had written criticism quite like this before: it was learned yet lucid, informal yet persuasive; and its language, for all its elegance and poetic conceits, packed a subversive wallop. If Samuel Johnson was the more deliberate aphorist, Hazlitt was the more self-conscious literary architect. You quote lines from Johnson; you want to recite entire passages from Hazlitt. In a few years, the critic blossomed into the essayist who, as Johnson noted of another writer, "lets thoughts drop from his pen as they rise into his mind." Hazlitt seems to hold nothing back: thoughts, feelings, biases, and impressions flow from him in a stream of associative effusions. He seems, in fact, even more passionate than the poets he's examining. Perhaps that's why he wrote in prose; the pentameter would undoubtedly have constrained him.

But Hazlitt knew exactly what he was doing: he wished to combine the literary and the conversational into what he called the "familiar style." "Any one may mouth out a passage with a theatrical cadence or get upon stilts to tell his thoughts," he wrote. "But to write or speak with propriety and simplicity is a more difficult task." His style, however, is anything but simple. Hazlitt takes language for a ride. He doesn't keep it level and moving at one speed; he guns it, putting it through loops and dives and steep climbs. At the risk of offending Hazlitteans everywhere, it bears saying that his descriptive allusions, lengthy quotations, and rhetorical flourishes may in some cases obscure the solid thinking of the arguments. But it is precisely this lack of self-restraint, this willingness to expose himself, this passionate need to explore his own responses to the world that give his work its flarelike iridescences.

Hazlitt's range was impressive even by the non-specialized standards of the day. He wrote political pamphlets, abridged (at Coleridge's urging) Abraham Tucker's "The Light of Nature Pursued," updated an English grammar, and began working on a history of English philosophy. He lectured on Shakespeare, Elizabethan literature, and the English comic writers; he gave us the concept of "gusto," which inspired Keats's idea of the chameleon poet; he wrote a biography of Napoleon; and he all but invented, if we don't count Plutarch, the profile of the contemporary celebrity. He was, in fact, the first of the great ambidextrous essayists, one hand thumping out politics and philosophy, the other executing glissandos of aesthetic appreciation.

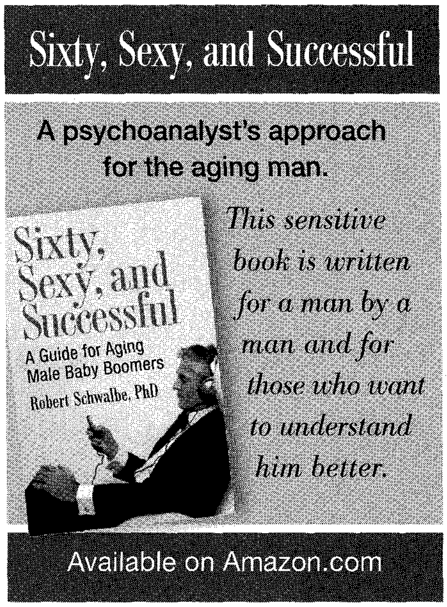
Duncan Wu's claim that Hazlitt is "the first modern man," is, however, a stretch. Hazlitt may have possessed, as Wu states, "a new sensibility" and a psychological grasp of people's behavior, but the same can be said about Rousseau, Shakespeare, and Johnson. What's modern about Hazlitt, and specific to him, is his role as a journalist at a time when journalism, especially periodical journalism, was becoming a staple of British society. A hundred and fifty years before the New Journalists of the nineteen-sixties rubbed our noses in their egos, Hazlitt put himself into his work with a candor that would have been unthinkable a few generations earlier.

It was a good time to be a critic. Not only were there as many literary egotists flitting in and out of London as had ever been assembled at one time—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Leigh Hunt, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Lamb, De Quincey—but dozens of magazines were being launched that proved instrumental in furthering the careers of both poets and journalists. Unlike their eighteenth-century forerunners—*The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*—the periodicals hatching around the time of the Regency (1811-20) specialized in making criticism a spectator sport.

According to the British literary scholar Bonamy Dobrée, men of letters in the mid-eighteenth century prided themselves on writing in a "middle style" that reflected the "voice of society"; a bolder style would have constituted an offense against taste. But, of course, these men were writing for a society that consisted basically of themselves. When Hazlitt turned to journalism, there was a larger audience ready and willing to buy books, and it wanted news about literature in words that it could understand. The periodicals, which encouraged their contributors to write in idiomatic, straight-shooting prose, thus helped make literature sociable. The pedant gave way to the polemicist, the Critick to the critic-reviewer, and culture became a topic of public discussion—and dissension.

In fact, literary journalism, in its first incarnation, was probably as intense as it would ever become. This was a period when the monarchy was teetering, banks were failing, taxes were onerous, unemployment was high, and the upper classes were fretting about Jacobins and revolutionaries. Conservatism was equated with repression, radicalism with sexual libertinism. Tory magazines such as *Blackwood's*, *John Bull*, and the *Quarterly Review* castigated republicans; Whiggish periodicals such as the *Morning Chronicle*, *The Edinburgh Review*, and *The London Magazine* reprimanded anyone holding Royalist views.

Apart from the small matter that Hazlitt lived in and around London during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, he could have been a New York intellectual of the sixties, involved in the same kind of infighting, shifting alliances, gossiping, and name-calling. Hazlitt, an avowed republican, was labelled "an infidel, a Jacobin, and a whoremonger" and dismissed as a "Cockney Aristotle," a lower-class writer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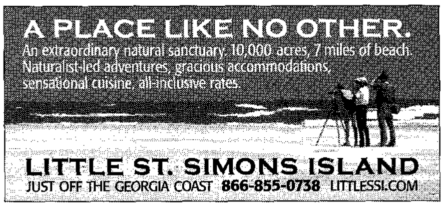
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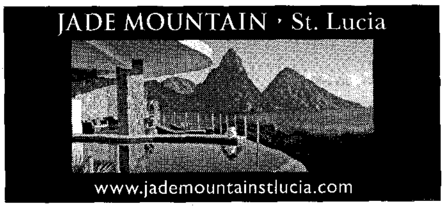
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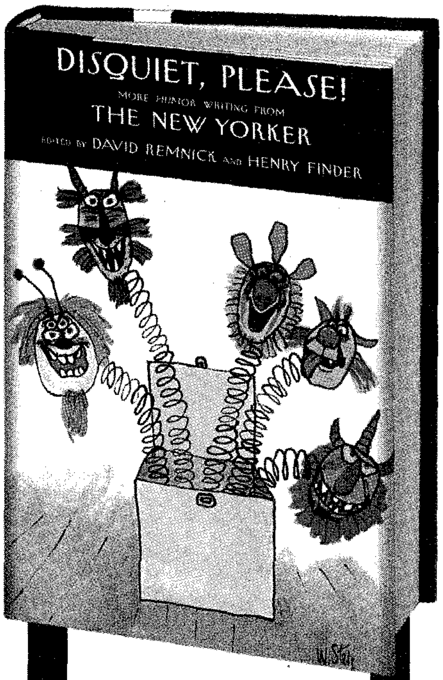

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who wanted to sound like his betters. In August, 1818, *Blackwood's* published such an outrageous attack that Hazlitt sued for libel and eventually accepted an out-of-court settlement. To his critics he would always be "a slang-whanger," who wished "to destroy the very foundations of modesty and decorum." According to Duncan Wu, "No writer was more reviled, and none were less deserving of it."

Hazlitt may not have deserved the abuse, but he certainly asked for it. The man suffered from intellectual Tourette's syndrome: he simply could not keep his mouth shut. Hazlitt saw a violation and immediately wrote out a ticket, and nothing you could say or do would make him reconsider. He couldn't even stop himself from biting the hand of Francis Jeffrey, whose magazine, *The Edinburgh Review*, helped feed him. If there was something honorable about this, there was also something cold. After finishing a not altogether favorable profile of Byron, Hazlitt learned that the poet had recently died. He could have revised, but he chose not to, explaining that it would be wrong to "turn undertakers' men to fix the glittering plate upon the coffin, or fall into the procession of popular woe. Death cancels everything but truth."

Naturally, there were consequences. He alienated Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth, whose political changes of heart deeply disappointed him. Hazlitt, who never wavered in his good opinion of the French Revolution and persisted in his admiration for Napoleon even when France and England were at war, was incensed by the backsliding of those who renounced their radicalism. Although he and Coleridge remained on speaking terms for fifteen years and found themselves, in 1811, living next door to one another in London (Hazlitt's wife had booted him out of the house), the friendship gradually soured. And, in 1816, when Coleridge published "The Statesman's Manual," which urged political reform based on Scripture, Hazlitt exploded. "Everlasting inconsequentiality marks all he does," he wrote.

There are writers who hide behind their words and there are those who shoulder up beside you. Hazlitt's "essays are emphatically himself," Virginia Woolf observed. "So thin is the veil of the essay as Hazlitt wore it, his very look comes before us." True, we feel that we know the writer, but how well do we know the man who doesn't write, the one who gets his hair cut, who knocks back a warm beer with friends? The fact is, essayists lie. They may not mean to, but they do. Like all writers, they create effects by adopting a tone, a tempo, a manner of address. Hazlitt's breezy, self-confident style gives the impression of a man secure enough to admit his own failings. Even when he regards himself in a quizzical light—a man who causes women to "split their sides with laughing at him"—we chalk it up to literary brio. We don't for a moment believe that he's inept, or unattractive, or capable of behaving like a lunatic. You can't write well and behave badly.

But, of course, you can, and Hazlitt did. He cheated on his wife, alienated friends, and when Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo he stayed drunk for weeks. For all the insouciance of his prose, Hazlitt could be a social disaster. His friend P. G. Patmore said that he entered a room "as if he had been brought back to it in custody." Coleridge famously described him as "brow-hanging, shoe-contemplative, strange." He was obviously combative, but, according to Wu, he was afraid of his housekeeper. He could stare down publishers, but was reluctant on a cold night to ask a stranger to shut the window of a coach. Perhaps that's one reason that bookish people are drawn to Hazlitt: he's terribly self-conscious in public and acutely conscious of the self in private; like them, he gets buffeted by fate or by people with more power, but, unlike them, he buffets back, which makes him, well, heroic.

Every essay should be regarded as a self-portrait of the author at his or her desk, not in the world. The new Hazlitteans, however, tend to see their man as he wants to be seen. Stanley Jones, who wrote a fine biography of Hazlitt in 1989, practically wrung his hands at the thought of Hazlitt's venturing into the cutthroat literary world of London. It's Hazlitt, though, who creates the impression that he wasn't made for the rough-and-tumble, that he was better suited for the purely contemplative life—a Regency Thomas Merton minus the Cross. It's an appealing picture, but it's incomplete. Hazlitt was an ambitious, toughminded, and tireless self-promoter with a physicality that biographers like Wu are only now picking up on. He walked, boxed, and played fives (an early form of racquetball), and "his sighs, groans, lamentations left no doubt that he was becoming warm in the spirit of the game." Patmore recalls seeing him, McEnroe-like, "fling his racket to the other end of the court, walk deliberately to the centre, with uplifted hands imprecate the most fearful curses on his head for his stupidity, and then rush to the side wall and literally dash his head against it." Nor did Hazlitt's combustible personality temper with age. The editor Robert Bell, who met him later in life, remarked, "There was not a particle of energy about him ordinarily. . . . But when he kindled, a flush spread over his sunken cheeks, his eyes lighted up wildly, his chest expanded, he looked like one inspired, his motions were eloquent, and his whole form partook of the enthusiasm."

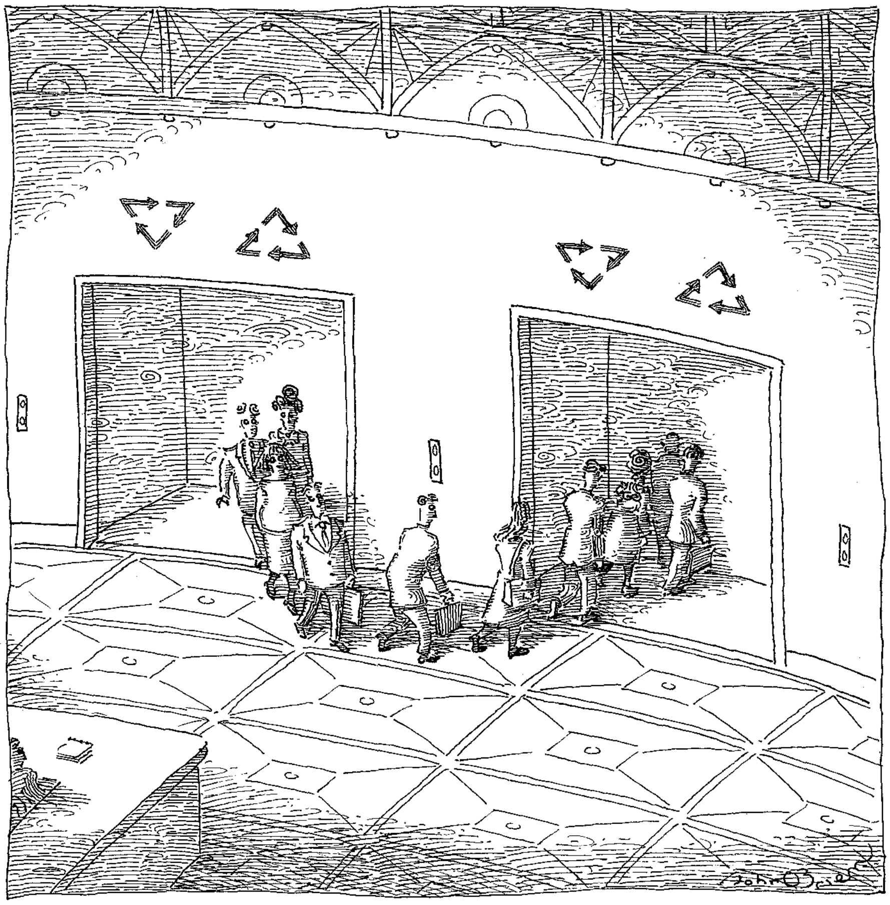
Hazlitt kindled in more ways than one. Although he intimated that Petrarch's unconsummated love for Laura was perfection, since "that which exists in the imagination is alone imperishable," Hazlitt consummated to a degree that even his friends felt was excessive. The truth is he was a nincompoop when it came to women. This needs saying because of two episodes in his life, both of which did irreparable harm to his reputation, the first because of lies spread by Coleridge and Wordsworth, the second because of his own propensity to tell the truth.

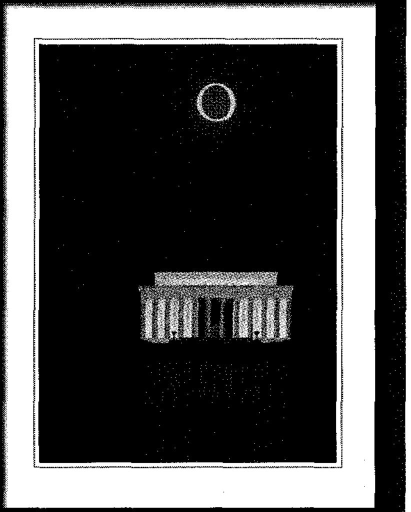
In 1803, while visiting Coleridge in the Lake District, Hazlitt chatted up a local woman in a tavern in Keswick. Either she insulted him or she rejected his advances, and he, so the story goes, lifted up her skirts and spanked her. When a party of her friends came around to give Hazlitt a ducking in a nearby pond, Coleridge packed him off to Wordsworth's house, in Grasmere. In Coleridge's later accounts of the mishap, he saved Hazlitt's life from two hundred mounted villagers, and, over the years, as relations between the men worsened, Coleridge and Wordsworth spitefully embroidered on the story, playing up Hazlitt's addiction "to women, as objects of sexual indulgence."

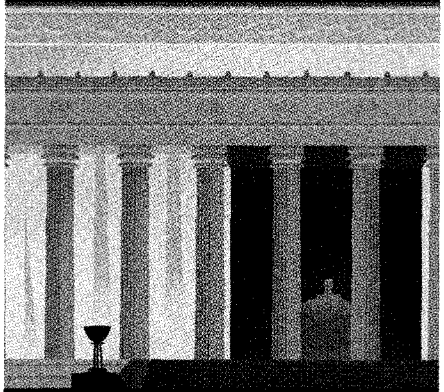
The next incident had nothing at all comical about it. In the summer of 1820, Hazlitt, now formally separated from his wife, took lodgings in Camden, London, and promptly fell in love with the landlord's daughter Sarah Walker. Hazlitt was forty-two, Sarah nineteen. It's difficult to know how much she encouraged him, as we have only Hazlitt's word for these events, but her telling him at one point "I always told you I had no affection for you" should have been a clue. Nonetheless, for two years Hazlitt thought about her constantly, finding hope in her smallest gesture. Staking everything on a few caresses she had allowed him, Hazlitt divorced his wife—a complicated procedure that required both of them to establish residency in Scotland—and threw himself at Sarah's feet. But when he returned from Scotland he found her with another man.

"I cannot forget her, and I can find no other like what she seemed," Hazlitt said. So he did what writers do: he wrote a book—in this case, an odd duck of a book, titled "Liber Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion." It purports to be the papers of a man recently deceased in the Netherlands and consists of a number of quick scenes and conversations between "H" and "S," followed by a series of letters that the anonymous author wrote and received while in Scotland. Many of the letters were real; a few were composed solely for the book itself. As usual, Hazlitt holds nothing back. He describes his obsession unsparingly, omitting no embarrassing detail, including his fear that the girl "runs mad for size."

Hazlitt must have known that his authorship would be discovered. He had made no secret of the "affair" and didn't hide the fact that he was writing about it. He hoped that doing so would be cathartic, but the only thing "Liber Amoris" seems to have accomplished was to give his enemies another stick to beat him with. A month after its publication, in 1823, the periodical *John Bull*, which had got hold of one of Hazlitt's letters to Sarah Walker, gleefully printed it, removing the book's fig leaf of fiction, and the bloodletting began: "a disgusting mass of profligacy and dullness," one critic wrote; the result of "a cockney's stupidity and folly," said another. The most galling review, however, might have been the one from the friendly







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critic who maintained that Hazlitt could not be the author since only a fool could have written such a book. Hazlitt's reputation never recovered. He wrote some of his best essays after 1823, but his books, which had never sold well, now barely sold at all.

Hazlitt did finally manage to put the girl behind him, and, in 1824, he married again. His new wife had a little money, but didn't seem inclined to spend it all on Hazlitt, and after they toured France and Italy she remained in Switzerland while he tried to make ends meet in London—never an easy thing for him to do. Despite writing millions of words during his career, Hazlitt barely scratched out a living. He was hounded by creditors, chased by bailiffs, and even jailed briefly, in February, 1823. During one such low point, Wu claims, Keats dropped in on Hazlitt to discuss his own prospects as a reviewer and journalist. He found him sitting alone in a bare room, having recently sold his furniture and paintings to pay off his debts. Keats stuck to poetry.

Wu's book, despite its defensive attitude and some unfortunate phrasings (his moods "went up and down like a yo-yo"; "She had a lot going for her"), is fun to read. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Leigh Hunt slide in and out of the narrative, sniping, complaining, gossiping, but, most of all, *thinking*. If Wu errs, it's on the side of enthusiasm. He doesn't even feign disinterest. None of the new Hazlitteans do. Only rarely does one of them allow that their man may have been too prickly, too tough on his friends, too indifferent to his wives. Wu sticks up for Hazlitt at almost every turn, finding a reason to justify nearly everything he said and did. Even the outrageous is carefully reconfigured as normalcy. Hazlitt once brought a prostitute to his rooms when his ten-year-old son William was visiting. Understandably upset, the boy told his mother, who then gave Hazlitt an earful. Instead of letting this go, Wu asks us to remember that "childhood as we know it is a Victorian construct, and Hazlitt wanted William (however misguidedly) to learn the ways of the world under his supervision rather than alone, or with school friends." If that's the case, why did Sarah Hazlitt, sixteen years before Victoria ascended to the throne, get so worked up? Not that I wish to expose my Victorian side, but couldn't Hazlitt at least have waited until the boy was bar-mitzvahed?

"Well, I've had a happy life," Hazlitt remarked, on his deathbed. "It was what he would have said," Stanley Jones concludes. Grayling and Wu concur. But it's hard to resist shouting "Wrong!" By no stretch of the imagination did Hazlitt have a happy life. Seven years earlier, thinking of Sarah Walker, he had written, "I have wanted only one thing to make me happy; but wanting that have wanted everything!" Frankly, that, too, seems an exaggeration. No doubt both statements were heartfelt, but that doesn't make them accurate. His biographers, taking him at his word, emphasize his resoluteness and consistency. But Hazlitt had his moods; he was human, and he changed his mind. "As to my old opinions, I am heartily sick of them," he complained in the winter of 1823:

> They have deceived me sadly. I was taught to think, and I was willing to believe, that genius was not a bawd, that virtue was not a mask, that liberty was not a name, that love had its seat in the human heart. Now I would care little if these words were struck out of the dictionary, or if I had never heard them.

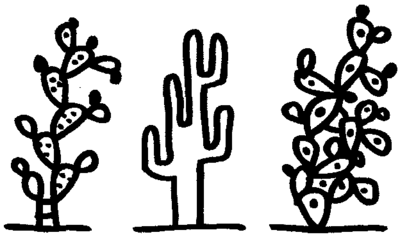
However, in one of his last essays, "The Letter-Bell," he's back to his old self: "I have never given the lie to my own soul. If I have felt any impression once, I feel it more strongly a second time; and I have no wish to revile and discard my best thoughts." Once again, and for the last time, he brings up Coleridge and can't resist getting in a few more digs. The mixture of sadness and resentment he feels so many years later only testifies to the warmth of that first friendship. He consoles himself with an old refrain: "There is at least a thorough *keeping* in what I write—not a line that betrays a principle or disguises a feeling. If my wealth is small, it all goes to enrich the same heap; and trifles in this way accumulate to a tolerable sum."

He died, owing money, in a cheap rooming house on Frith Street on September 18, 1830. His landlady is said to have hidden the body under the bed while she showed the room. The building has since been converted into a small hotel. It has thirty bedrooms, with antique furniture, claw-footed freestanding baths, and old-fashioned pull-chain cisterns. It's called Hazlitt's. Coleridgeans are welcome. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Song Is You, *by Arthur Phillips (Random House; $25).* Phillips's best writing achieves an elaborate, gratifying precision, combining a naturally flamboyant style with neat, observational wit. This quality is sharpest in some of the character portraits and delectable set pieces that animate this novel, his fourth, but the central plot is sometimes strained. A middle-aged advertising director, whose marriage has broken up following the death of his two-year-old son, plays an invisible and unlikely muse to a young Irish singer on the brink of stardom. As the two engage in an indirect seduction—they never meet—the narrative veers close to the "adolescent fantasy" that its protagonist fears. But this curious bond provides an armature for Phillips's beautiful evocation of music's consoling power to blur the borders between art, artist, and consumer.

Apologize, Apologize!, *by Elizabeth Kelly (Twelve; $23.99).* In this rousingly pell-mell début novel, the tender arc of a bildungsroman is nearly squelched by a backdrop of epic family farce. The "fantastic Flanagans" of Squibnocket Beach suffer from "compulsive vividness." They brawl and squall without consequences, kept afloat by money "falling from the sky like ticker tape," courtesy of a disapproving and distant media-mogul patriarch. Ma is an aspiring Marxist insurrectionist ("Ma collected Commies the way other women accumulate Tupperware") who thinks that being difficult is "the hallmark of the artistic mind"; Pop is a skirt-chaser and a drunk. An equally lunatic (and alcoholic) "maiden uncle" is entrusted with the actual work of bringing up the kids. All are observed with sardonic affection by the straight-arrow elder son, who lives in the shadow of his wild-card brother. Inevitably, tragedy strikes, but the giddy prose never stops, detonating like a string of firecrackers.



The Complete Game, *by Ron Darling (Knopf; $24.95).* What's on the mind of a major-league pitcher, out there in mid-inning and mid-career trouble once again, with men on base, his concentration wavering, and some of his best stuff not on call today? According to this account by Ron Darling, the stalwart ex-Mets starter and incumbent Mets broadcaster, it's a good three or four pages' worth of anxiety, reminders, tendencies, situations, afterthoughts, and admonishments per pitch. "Once again," as he puts it, "I thought, This is not good." Darling offers pitches and outcomes (but no box scores) from ten selected games in his career, including a successful World Series start against the Red Sox at Fenway Park in 1986, a gruesome windy-day thumping suffered at Wrigley Field, and his celebrated extra-inning near-no-hitter back when he was pitching for Yale. Among them are enough oddities and thrilling turns of baseball to make a reader glad to be here and—well, not out there.

The Last Witch of Langenburg, *by Thomas Robisheaux (Norton; $26.95).* In the German hamlet of Langenburg in 1672, panic ensued when a young woman named Anna Fessler ate a butter cake and died overnight. Had Anna Schmieg, her neighbor, poisoned the cake by means of witchcraft? Robisheaux explores the lore surrounding one of Germany's last witch trials, using details from a gruesome autopsy report, an investigation mounted by the court adviser Ulrich von Gülchen, and eyewitness testimony. The rich microhistory that results illustrates the contradictions between early modern European thought and medieval superstitions. Schmieg's fate—underscored by filial betrayal, torture, and a wrangled confession—is worth learning, but, frustratingly, Robisheaux leaves larger historical questions unanswered, and we're left pondering the significance of why Schmieg was the last witch of Langenburg.

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HIGHLY ILLOGICAL

"Star Trek."

BY ANTHONY LANE

What happened to "Star Trek"? There it was, a nice little TV series, quick and wry, injecting the frontier spirit into the galactic void, and managing to touch on weighty themes without getting sucked into them and squashed. It ran for three seasons, and then, in 1969, it did the decent, graceful thing and expired. End of story. Except that the story was slapped back to life and forced to undergo one warping after another: five more television series (including an animated version) and no fewer than ten feature films, all of them based on the debatable assumption that you can take a format designed to last fifty minutes and stretch it out to twice that length, then pray that the thinness doesn't show. Believe me, it showed. One of the movies was about humpback whales.

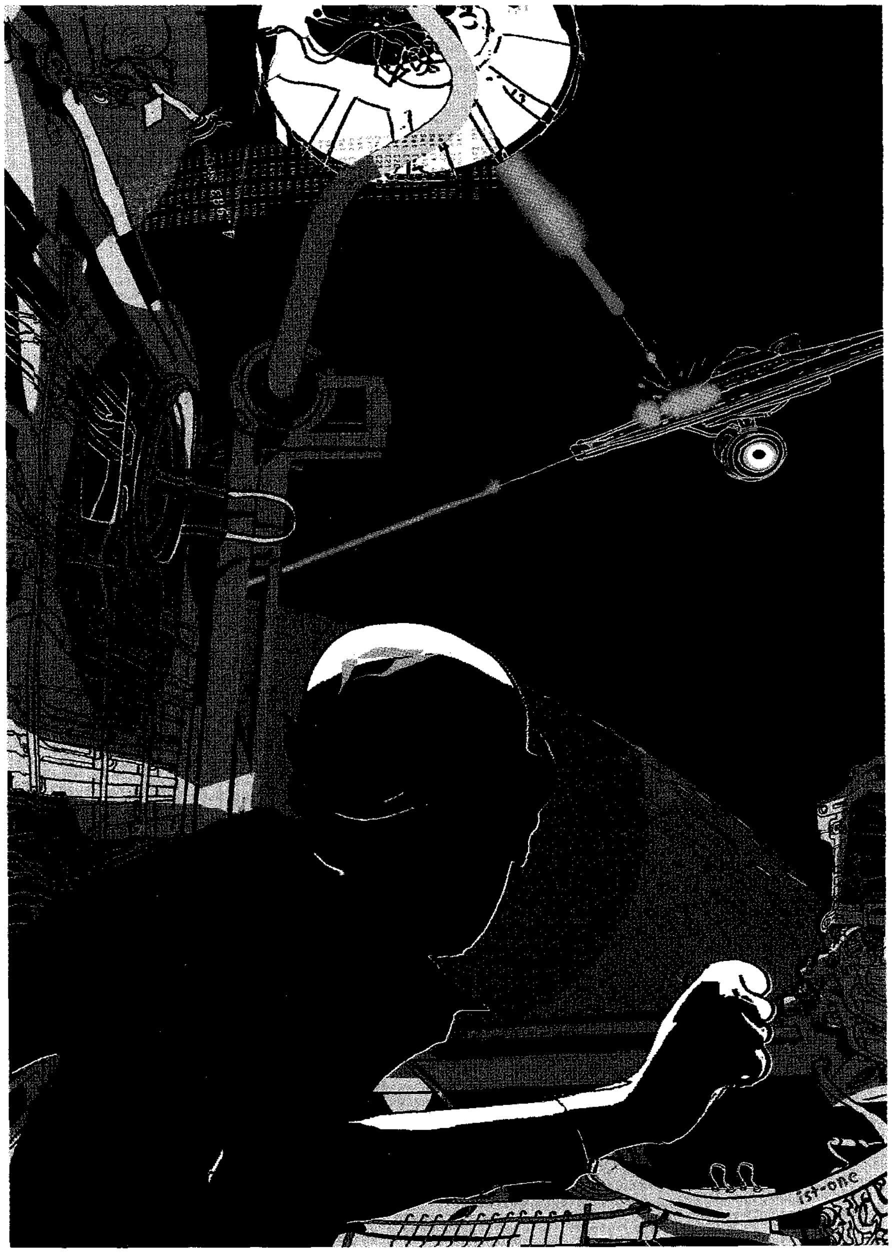
But fear not. Here comes J. J. Abrams, riding in like Shane to save the threatened franchise. Abrams made his reputation in television, conjuring up "Alias" and "Lost"—another show that began in vigorous style and has shown increasingly little sign of knowing how to stop. He directed the third "Mission: Impossible," which had its own distant echo of the small screen, before producing "Cloverfield," a monster-eats-Manhattan flick weakened only by our reluctance to care about, or even notice, which of its appetizing youngsters had become an entrée. No such problems for the eleventh "Star Trek," which arrives ready-branded, peopled with a set of action figures, led by Kirk and Spock, who require neither introduction nor advertisement but, rather, a simple chance to freshen up. That, I presume, is why Paramount went with Abrams, who is less of a creator than a re-creator, toiling to reboot old myths and tropes that feel overloaded or fried. He is the perfect purveyor of fictions to a generation so easily and instinctively jaded that what it craves, above all, is a storyteller who—with or without artistic personality, and regardless of any urge to provoke our thoughts or trouble our easy dreams—will never jade.

Hence the demeanor of the new film. It begins peacefully enough, with a Federation starship, the U.S.S. Kelvin, being dragged into an apocalyptic ambush by a tattooed Romulan maniac in a pitch-black battle cruiser, who slaughters the human captain and blows the Kelvin to kingdom come, even as the howling wife of the second-in-command gives birth inside an escape pod. As I say, a quiet start. In the midst of this, the doting parents find time, over the airwaves, to have one of those "No, darling, what would *you* like to call the baby?" conversations that bring so much joy to interstellar couples everywhere. Their first thought is Tiberius, which, given that the Romulan captain is named Nero (Eric Bana), suggests a delightful rerun of first-century imperial Rome, complete with a new Caligula cavorting in zero gravity. In the end, though, they play it safe and go for James. Cut to his childhood, in which he trashes a red Corvette (nice work, Jim, getting hold of fossil fuel in the twenty-third century), and thence to his early adulthood, which finds him picking fights, eying girls, and gazing at a ship under construction on the plains of Iowa: the U.S.S. Enterprise.

Here, in other words, is a long-range backstory—a device that, in the Hollywood of recent times, has grown from an option to a fetish. I lost patience with "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" once we learned of Willy Wonka's primal trauma (his father was a dentist, and forbade him candies, so guess how he reversed that deprivation?), and, likewise, with "Batman Begins," from the moment that mini-Bruce tumbled into a well full of bats. What's wrong with "Batman *Is*"? In all narratives, there is a beauty to the merely given, as the narrator does us the honor of trusting that we will take it for granted. Conversely, there is something offensive in the implication that we might resent that pact, and, like plaintive children, demand to have everything explained. Shakespeare could have kicked off with a flashback in which the infant Hamlet is seen wailing with indecision as to which of Gertrude's breasts he should latch onto, but would it really have helped us to grasp the dithering prince? Or, to update the question: I know it's not great when your dad dies a total hero *and* leaves you orphaned at the same time, but did James T. Kirk have to grow up such a cocky son of a gun?

He is played here by Chris Pine, who struggles with a screenplay, written by Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman, that could have been downloaded from a software program entitled "Make Your Own Annoying Rebel." Sample line: Kirk is hailed as "the only genius-level repeat offender in the Midwest" by Captain Pike (Bruce Greenwood), who exhorts him to put aside his brawling and enlist in Starfleet. Jim rolls up next morning on a motorbike, hung over, with bruises from the night before, as surly as Steve McQueen; but roll up he does, taking his place beside the other recruits—among them Bones McCoy (Karl Urban)—and from here on the path to Kirkhood is plain. True, he boards the Enterprise by subterfuge on her maiden voyage, but since when did a little insubordination prevent a guy from winding up as captain? I thoroughly approved of his bedding an extraterrestrial female with green skin, eco-sex being all the rage two centuries from now, but that is the only downtime afforded by the recklessly rolling plot, although Jim still manages to defy the continuity team and switch hair color from dirty blond to redhead and back again. Don't worry, he's still a natural dickhead underneath.

While our man has been trying and failing to grow up, Captain Nero has been waiting among the stars. Now he pulls the same stunt he did with the Kelvin, luring friendly craft into the maw of his ship, which looks like a dozen Philippe Starck lemon squeezers clumped together and dipped in squid ink. The Enterprise finds herself amid the drifting debris of her sister ships, torn apart by Nero, and, with revenge beckoning, Abrams gets his chance to unpack the tools of the "Star Trek" trade, starting with some brightly polished phasers. Not being a Trekkie, I didn't particularly mind how he refashioned the gizmos, but it was still surprising to learn that, when beaming down to planets and up to the ship, the crew members no longer vanish with the old granular shiver but, instead, whip around and around, aided by cartoonish whirling strokes, as if planning to reconstitute themselves as fruit smoothies at the other end. They even get to communicate, as they did in the nineteen-sixties, via these marvellous little phones that you actually hold up to your ear! Isn't the future great?



Eric Bana as Captain Nero in J. J. Abrams's movie about the young Kirk and Spock.

ISTVAN BANYAI

This new "Star Trek" is nonsense, no question ("Prepare the red matter!"), but at least it's not boggy nonsense, the way most of the other movies were, and it powers along, unheeding of its own absurdity, with a drive and a confidence that the producers of the original TV series might have smiled upon. The crew is well sketched, with Simon Pegg making a late but amiable entrance as Scotty, and with Chekov (Anton Yelchin) apparently nudging puberty; mired in his Russian accent, he mixes up his "v"s and "w"s, ("wektor," "inwisible"), a tongue-slip that Dickens pretty much exhausted for comic value in "The Pickwick Papers," but I guess the old jokes are the best. Similarly, our heroes keep clinging to brinks by their fingertips, as if to prove that a proper cliffhanger needs a genuine cliff—a curiously nostalgic approach, although the director's fondness for the retro is crucial to his non-stop knowingness, with its hints of both hipster and nerd. He gorges on cinema as if it were one of those all-you-can-eat buffets, piling his plate with succulent effects, whether they go together or not. Hence the red ravening beast that pops up on a random planet, clearly left over from the props cupboard of "Cloverfield"; the man-to-Romulan fistfight borrowed from "M:i:3"; and, I regret to say, a dose of parallel universe. Come on, guys, you're already part of a make-believe world in which mankind can outfly the speed of light. Isn't that parallel enough for you?

This theme of alternative reality is clumsily worked, and not a patch on its tighter, more alluring, and thus much scarier treatment in "Coraline." Its effect here is to saddle us with two Mr. Spocks, one from the vulnerable present and one from the comforting future, and its main purpose, I suspect, is to drag in Leonard Nimoy, who these days makes Bela Lugosi look like Zac Efron, and thus insure that all the "Star Trek" scholars in the audience will have to hurry home and change their underwear. On the other hand, it does mean that we get more of Zachary Quinto, whose very name sounds like the sacred text of a superior race, and who, in his role as the youthful Spock, is the most commanding reason to see this film. He alone prepares the gray matter. Bowie-thin, solemn but not humorless, tacitly quoting Sherlock Holmes, and nipping around like a sixties groover in his skintight costume, he wipes the floor with Kirk, while making time for a Vulcanizing smooch with Lieutenant Uhura (Zoë Saldana), the resident linguist, who is said to have "exceptional oral sensitivity." Beyond that, however, Quinto is the one person here who may leave teenaged viewers more perplexed than puffed up; he somehow rebukes the movie's whole obsession with backstory and immaturity by seeming riper and wiser than the charmless folly that is spun around him. Only once does Spock unnerve, when he says of the ship's crew, "I want everyone to continue performing admirably." Is that a warning of incoming sequels? I fear so, Captain. Shields up. ♦

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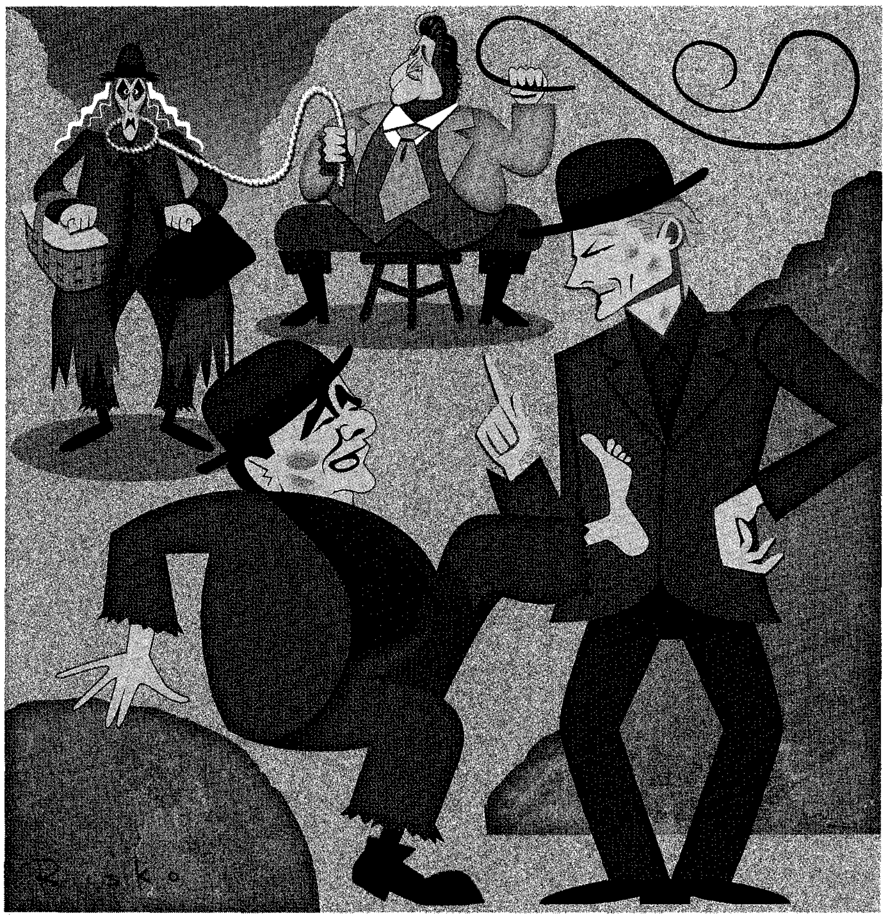
THE THEATRE

PANIC ATTACK

"Waiting for Godot" back on Broadway.

BY JOHN LAHR



Glover, Goodman, Lane, and Irwin as Beckett's doomed foursome.

Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," billed as "the laugh sensation of two continents," made its American début at the Coconut Grove Playhouse, in Miami, Florida, in 1956. My father, Bert Lahr, was playing Estragon, one of the two bowler-hatted tramps who pass the time in a lunar landscape as they wait in vain for the arrival of a Mr. Godot. "Playing 'Waiting for Godot' in Miami was like doing 'Giselle' in Roseland," my father said. The play was not so much a laugh riot as a revolution in theatrical storytelling; inevitably, it was met with militant incomprehension. "A dramatic whatzit," Walter Winchell called it, adding, "The history of frammis never had anything so rillerrah." On opening night, half the audience walked out after the first act; the next day, there was a line at the box office—to return tickets.

I remember running the lines with my father. (I was fourteen then and often dragooned into this tense task.) I also recall the curious contradiction between his colossal insecurity about the meaning of the words that he struggled to learn and his adamant conviction of the emotional truth of the comedy contained in those perplexing words. If Dad was mystified by the play's idiom, he understood all too well its psychological terrain: waiting, anguish, bewilderment. In Florida, he was at war with the audience, with Tom Ewell, who played Vladimir, and, most of all, with the director, Alan Schneider, whose name was forever banned from our dinner-table conversation. I also remember the thrill of the restaged Broadway production later that year (directed by Herbert Berghoff, with E. G. Marshall as Vladimir, Kurt Kasznar as Pozzo, and Alvin Epstein as Lucky), and Dad's profound satisfaction at his succès d'estime in New York. That fabled Broadway début, which lasted only ten weeks, was the highlight of my father's half century on the American stage. Ten years later, when I was teaching "Waiting for Godot" at Hunter College night school, I smuggled Dad into class and asked him to give us his interpretation of Estragon. A quizzical, almost irritated look came over his face, his eyes darted around the room, his nostrils flared. "Belly," he said finally, touching his stomach. "Gut ache" is how the playwright Harold Pinter described Beckett's message: "A major irritation, a most stern and ruthless activity without question or answer, a three-card trick, a necessity. The necessity to what? The necessity to *say*."

"Nothing to be done": the first words of "Waiting for Godot" announce both the characters' existential impasse and the author's aesthetic attack—no context, no exposition, no admonitions, no answers, no common ground. "Two things stated: absence and attendance," Pinter said. There is nothing to be done; one can only be. Of the many accomplishments of Anthony Page's astute new production of "Godot" (the first Broadway revival, after fifty-three years; at Studio 54), the most impressive is its clarity about the central paradox of Beckett's vision: the compulsion to narrate our meaninglessness *is* our meaning. In Santo Loquasto's elegant rocky clearing, with one barren tree rising almost to the catwalk, the ozone is full of brilliant blather. "Let us try and converse calmly," Estragon says to Vladimir, "since we are incapable of keeping silent." Silence is always a prelude to terror:

> VLADIMIR: Say something!
> ESTRAGON: I'm trying.
> *Long silence.*
> VLADIMIR (*in anguish*): Say anything at all!
> ESTRAGON: What do we do now?
> VLADIMIR: Wait for Godot.
> ESTRAGON: Ah!
> *Silence.*
> VLADIMIR: This is awful.

Beckett's plays, which caper around the abyss, link the clown's irrepressible impulse for action to the playwright's

ROBERT RISKO

sense of metaphysical stalemate. He deconstructs the despair behind the clown's antic high jinks, which is why Buster Keaton, the dour English clown Max Wall, and my father were such expert messengers of his rueful stoicism. To Beckett's vaudeville of collapse, these performers brought their own unexamined torment. Their confusion magnified the poignance of Beckett's comedy of abdication; their routines—Vladimir and Estragon's hat juggling, for instance, a flourish borrowed from the Marx Brothers' "Duck Soup"—were transformed from demonstrations of prowess to triumphs over entropy. "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist," Estragon says. Long before "Waiting for Godot" codified spiritual paralysis into drama, comedians like Jimmy Durante had unwittingly prefigured it. "Didja ever get the feelin' that you wanted to go? But you wanted to stay? But you wanted to go?" Durante sang.

In the half century that separates the two Broadway productions, "Waiting for Godot" has gone from ridicule to required reading, and the clowns the play evokes have become a nearly extinct species. In the new production, two noted comic actors, Nathan Lane and Bill Irwin, take on the roles of Estragon and Vladimir. Whereas the old clowns were not educated men—they felt much more than they understood—Lane and Irwin are emblematic of the current, more knowing, more self-conscious breed. (Irwin even has a degree in clowning: Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Clown College, Class of '74.) They are lucid, they get all their laughs, but the price of their cultivation is an unfortunate absence of urgency. They seem to understand more than they feel; they can't quite reach the mad, inspired levitation of the authentic clown's poetic suffering.

Lane and Irwin—one short and round, the other tall and lean—make a piquant comic silhouette; the contrast is meant to illustrate their characters' personalities. Estragon is rooted in the earth, hungry, elemental; Vladimir is curious, a wanderer, the intellect. But Lane's natural alertness tends to encroach on Irwin's psychic territory, skewing, though not spoiling, their comic chemistry. Lane meets all the challenges of the play, except the challenge to find the terror behind his professional manic mask. Red-faced and grubby, he stays technically within his comfort zone, never using Beckett's great prose as a springboard into the emotional unknown. Estragon eats his sorry carrot amusingly enough, but we don't feel the profound emptiness that it's meant to fill. And Lane's high-pitched voice, in the yapping upper registers of anger, can make Beckett's lost soul sound like a wise-ass. "All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery!" he berates Vladimir. Nonetheless, it is, for the most part, a winning performance. Irwin also has some good innings, none more memorable than Vladimir's bewildered lament at the finale: "Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today?" And, together, Lane and Irwin have a particularly hilarious time trying to make Pozzo's drooling pink-eyed factotum, Lucky (the excellent John Glover), speak.

As Pozzo, the sadistic master who controls Lucky with a whip and a long rope, John Goodman is a huge, startling figure. He plays the tyrant with the ferocity and impetuousness of a big baby who wants an audience. "Is everybody looking at me?" Pozzo says, jerking the rope to raise Lucky's head. "Will you look at me, pig!" In the first act, Goodman is all British tweeds and bombast; in the second act, he reappears, still connected to Lucky by a short rope but now blind and beached like a whale. He flaps helplessly on the ground. Vladimir and Estragon toy with him; in a struggle worthy of Sisyphus they try to get the behemoth Pozzo to his feet, which gives the production a superb opportunity for fun. Badgered with questions by the tramps, Pozzo, in his disarray, finds genuine eloquence: "When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that enough for you." The speech has a Shakespearean ring, and it is worthy of Shakespeare.

At the finale, Beckett leaves his characters where he found them: alone, in silence, unable to live or to die, facing the catastrophe of cosmic indifference. "Don't touch me. Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!" Estragon says at the beginning of Act II. By the end of this slapstick tragedy, the void has settled over the tramps like a fog. "Shall we go?" Vladimir asks. "Yes, let's go," Estragon says. Unmoving, they stare straight ahead; as the curtain falls, Estragon tentatively holds out a hand to Vladimir, who takes it. The bittersweet moment, like Page's production, is both heartbreaking and exhilarating. ♦

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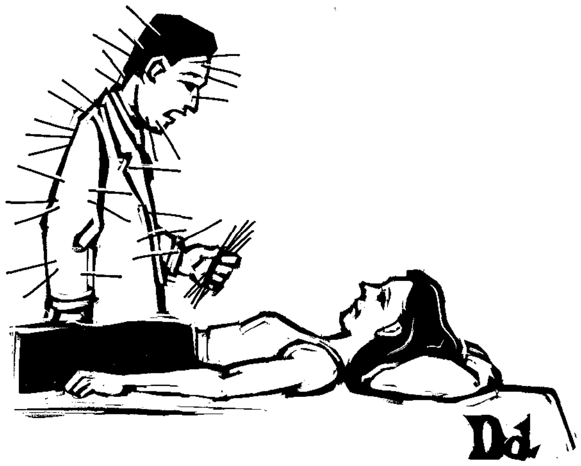
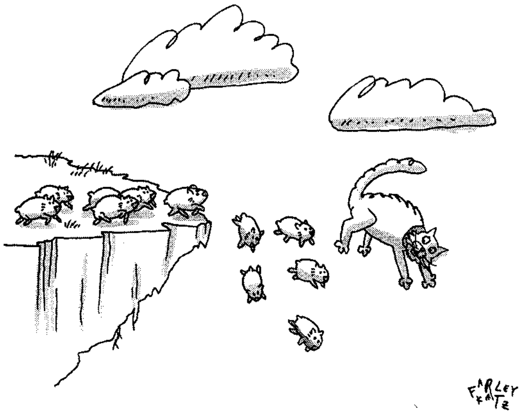
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Victoria Roberts, must be received by Sunday, May 17th. Finalists in the May 4th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 1st issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Gesundheit."
Bob Vogel, Portland, Maine



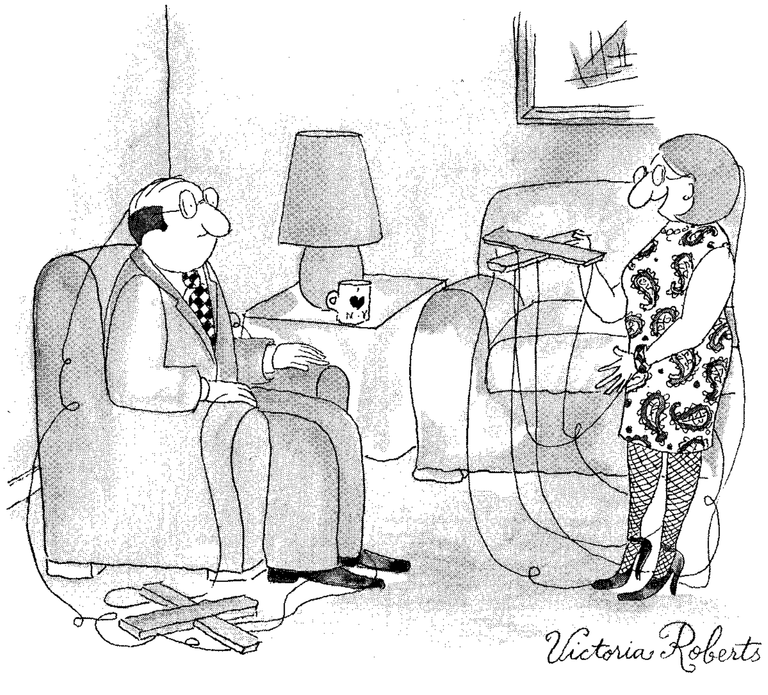
THE FINALISTS

"Just to confirm—I get seventy-two lemmings, right?"
Chris Norborg, Chicago, Ill.

"Table for eleven? Right this way."
Simon Narode, Portland, Ore.

"I'm just curious—what's your excuse?"
Pinghan Chua, Alexandria, Va.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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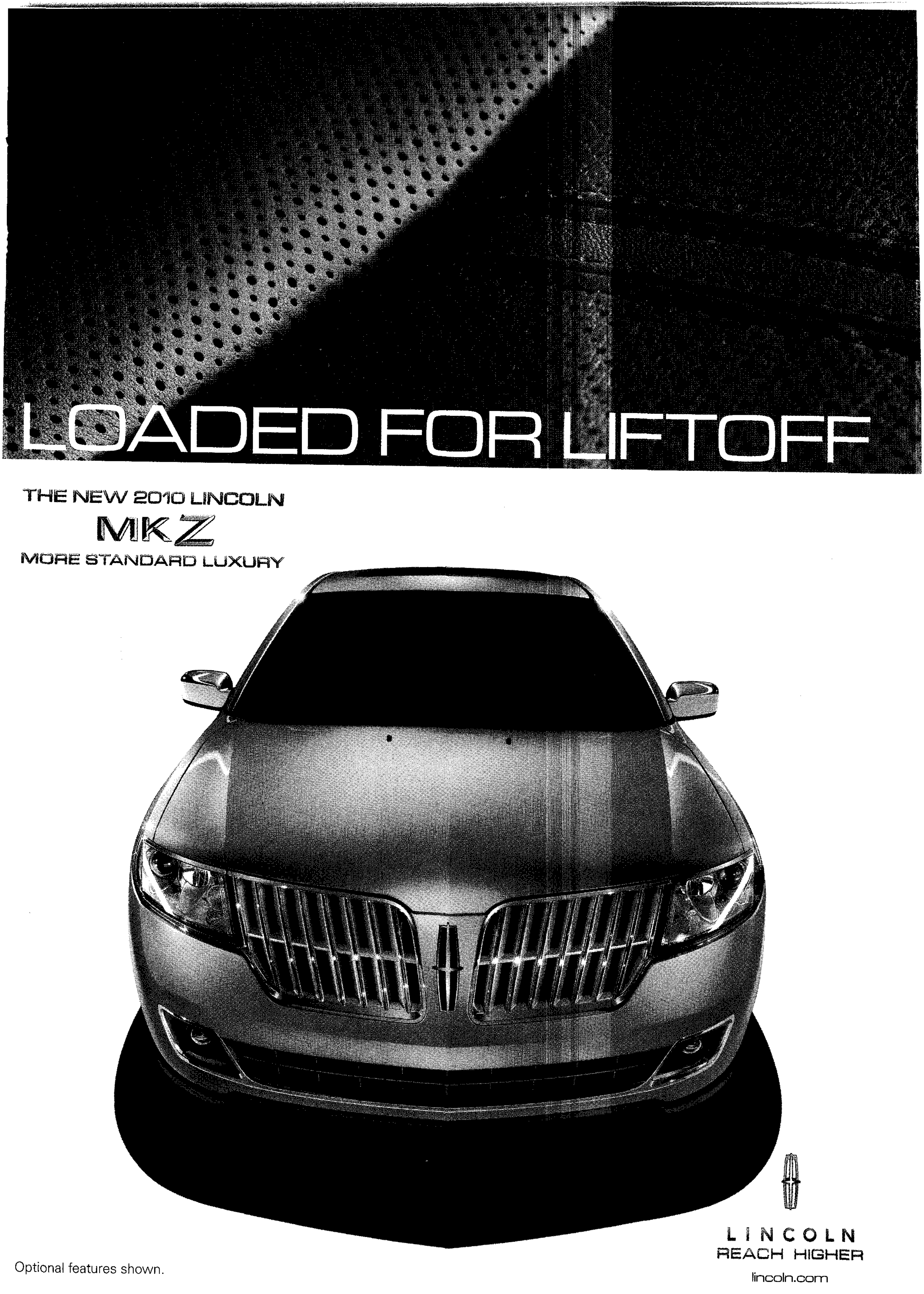
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